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La Marmoset, THE DETECTIVE QUEEN;

OR,
The Lost Heir of Morel.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
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"THE HEART OF GOLD," "THE WOLF-DE-
MON," "THE WITCHES OF NEW YORK,"
"THE CHILD OF THE SAVANNAH,"
"OVERLAND KIT," "FRESH OF
FRISCO," ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE TWO GALLEY-SLAVES.

JUST outside the Barrier St. Antoine, in an obscure side street, is a little inn—so-called, but in reality nothing but a low drinking-shop—which displayed upon its swinging sign the pic-

ture of a red goat, prancing gayly upon its hind legs, so that the inference was plain that as the "Inn of the Red Goat" the tavern desired to be known.

It is of Paris that we write, the queen city of the world, the home of luxury, the abode of vice, where craft and greed struggle with devilish cunning against honesty and justice.

The Red Goat Inn, Master Jean Facade, proprietor, being without the "walls" of Paris, was free from the duty upon wine levied at the barrier, so it had quite a trade, as its wines were both good and cheap, and the host—withered, rat-like Jean—a rare hand at the cook-stove.

Not without a certain kind of fame, too, was the obscure inn, for upon the police register, opposite to its name, was written the single word, "suspect."

In plain terms the inn was believed by the authorities to be the resort of a certain class upon whom the police had need to keep a watchful eye.

Even though France is now a republic, yet the system of police espionage which grew up under a despotic government still prevails.

On a pleasant evening in April a few customers were seated in the little garden at the back of the cabaret conversing noisily, and sipping their wine. All of them were workingmen, of the red-handed commune stamp, who worked one day and idled the next, plotting how to overthrow the government under which they lived. Not very dangerous fellows generally, although once in a while a king or a czar-killer comes from their ranks.

The host sat by the door which led from the wine-room into the garden, smoking a pipe and watching his guests with a sarcastic smile upon his heavily-lined and weather-beaten face.

In person, Facade was about the medium size, well advanced in years, quite gray, and with a shrewd expression upon his features.

And as the workmen talked and the host watched, into the garden came a tall, roughly-dressed man with dirty face and hands and a



"I AM TOO GALLANT A MAN TO DISPUTE A LADY'S WORD, BUT YOU DARE NOT SHOW ME YOUR FACE."

rolling gait, and whom Jean, at first sight, set down for a boatman of the Seine.

The man halted just inside the gate and looked around; the noisy group at the table never noticed him, but the host did, for there was something about the visitor that appeared familiar.

Straight up to Facade he came, pulled off his greasy cap and holding it out to the host said: "Give a poor devil a sou or two to help him on his way!"

Master Facade was puzzled; the individual was no stranger, and yet he could not place him.

"Why should I give to you whom I don't know?" he answered, roughly.

"Oh, *sangdieu!* How can you lie in that way?" the beggar exclaimed, yet taking care to speak so low that the workmen at the table could not overhear him. "Is it thus you treat an old friend who has done duty with you at Toulon?"

At the mention of Toulon, the city of the galley-slaves, Jean turned frightfully pale and big drops of perspiration started forth upon his forehead. Observing which the other laughed and slapped him in the most familiar manner upon the shoulder.

"Aha, master Jean, do I make goose-flesh all over you?" he continued; "but, don't be alarmed; I am no police spy to make mischief—to reveal to the world that Jean Facade, the host of the Red Goat, once served his time at Toulon as a galley-slave, and was known as Black Jean, the Stabber."

"Who are you?" gasped the other, in terror.

"Your old friend, the man you sent for."

The countenance of the innkeeper at once changed, and he drew a long breath.

"The saints be thanked!" he cried. "By my life! you frightened me out of a year's growth!" Then he pushed a chair toward the other and bade him sit down, examining him with great curiosity the while. "I should not have known you; your disguise is perfect—not a single feature to fix remembrance. But, what does it mean? Are you in trouble? I heard that you were riding on the very topmost wave, and that is why I sent for you, for I have a scheme to offer in which there is a fortune, but it can only be handled by a man who has both position and money."

"And, of course, a man with position and money, and with brains in his head, would instantly come, when sent for, to the cabaret of the Red Goat, a place of bad reputation, kept by an ex-galley-slave, as my esteemed friend, the minister of police, informed me, when I made a guarded inquiry in regard to it."

"Right; I am an ass!" Jean acquiesced. "And you—you always had a head on your shoulders."

"It was not for nothing that in the old time our comrades called me the Prince of Assassins. But, now to business; what is the game? If it is a big one I am your man; if it is small, I want nothing to do with it. I cannot afford to waste my time on trifles."

"What do you think of fifty millions of francs?"

"Aha!" and the eyes of the other sparkled; "it is a pretty sum!"

"And is worth your while?"

"*Morbleu!* do you think that I am a Rothschild that I can afford to turn up my nose at fifty millions of francs?"

"Good! listen, then, and attentively, for it is like a romance."

"I am all ears."

"Once there was a Count of Morel—"

"I know him—I know the race—curses on them!" the other cried. "It was the house of Morel that made me what I am, an outcast, with the galley brand upon my shoulder. Oh, I am not likely to forget the race of Morel while life remains!"

"So much the better; I am about to offer you revenge."

"You could not offer me anything more welcome."

"Some twenty-five years ago the Count of Morel left France and never returned."

"He did not dare to return, for I had sworn to kill him, and he knew me well enough to believe that I would keep my oath."

"He went to America—to some wild part of that land known as Florida, and there died."

"Yes, I know; I read all about it at the time. He was captured by the savages and slain."

"Exactly; he had become a planter near some place in Florida called the Everglades, where the Seminole Indians dwelt. The savages rose against the whites, and the plantation of Morel, at Tampa Bay, was the first spot upon which they spent their fury. It was a bloody deed, and Morel had married, too, in that strange land—married an American girl, and by her had a child."

"Ah, the wife and child are something new; but they perished, I suppose, at the time the plantation was ravaged by the savages. I remember it was stated that all were slain. I read the news with fierce eagerness, thinking that fate had chosen to avenge my wrongs through the medium of the red-skins."

"So it was supposed at the time, but it was afterward discovered that the child had been

spared by the Seminoles, and had been carried off by them. She was an interesting girl, about four years old, and, after remaining in the hands of the Indians for a year or so, she was seen and ransomed by a French trader who dwelt at a place on the coast called Eau Jolie—he having discovered that the child was of his race, but being totally ignorant in regard to her parentage. Shortly after he ransomed her the trader, who was named Auguste Blinville, returned to France, bringing the child with him. Now comes the interesting part. The American brother of the lady whom the Count of Morel married never was willing to believe that the child, his niece, had perished, and, although a poor man, spent both time and money in searching for her among the Seminoles, but as they had parted with her to the trader, his search was fruitless, nor did he ascertain anything whatever in regard to her fate. Then came a sudden turn of Fortune's wheel. A railroad, running southward, was projected, and it cut through the plantations of Count Morel and of the brother. The rise in value of the land was enormous; the American became rich; the estate of Morel from almost nothing jumped to be worth fifty millions of francs, and then, aided by his money, the brother got upon the right track. He discovered that the count's daughter did escape the slaughter, as he had always believed—that she had been ransomed by the French trader and taken by him to France. To France then he has come; he arrived yesterday, and has already put himself in communication with the police; great sums he offers for the restoration of the lost heir of Morel, for whom a fortune of fifty millions of francs awaits."

"I perceive the game; it is grand! The American is a barbarian, like all his race; he comes here to Paris as innocent as a child. He seeks a lost heir; if the true child—now a well-grown girl—cannot be found, will not a false one answer the purpose as well?"

"That is the idea. A friend of mine, a notary, whom the American has employed, who has been 'in trouble' like you and I, furnished me the information, and he suggested that if the right blind could be found the fifty millions of francs might be secured."

"The idea is superb, and the right man is found, for I will undertake to skin this American savage. The trick is worth the trouble."

CHAPTER II.

THE RIVALS.

In one of the old and quiet streets of the Faubourg St. Germaine—that quarter of the gay capital sacred to the families who can trace their line to the time of Charlemagne—was the Palace de Morel.

Of that ancient family—whose founder, so the records ran, received the honor of knighthood from the hands of Charles, the Hammer, in person, after the bloody fight at Tours when the tide of Saracen invasion was rolled back by the warlike Gauls, and all Europe saved from being overrun by the Moslem invader—two weak women alone remained. These were Marie Antoinette, Countess Morel, a young and beautiful blonde beauty, niece of the unfortunate adventurer who had found an unmarked grave amid the wilds of Florida, and a cousin of the slain count, three times removed, a middle-aged lady, Madame Diane de Moissac.

Marie's father and mother had died when she was quite young, and she had been reared by the Count of Morel, and he had called upon Madame Diane, who was in needy circumstances, to superintend the bringing up of the orphan.

By the count's death Marie inherited his estates, for no one in France had known aught of his marriage to the daughter of the New World, until the news of his death came to his native land, and as the report stated that both wife and child had perished in the slaughter, naturally Marie inherited all as the next of kin.

The inheritance, which had thus descended to the young girl, was not a large one, yet ample enough to support the two ladies in a manner becoming their station.

But for Marie, the descendant of one of the oldest families in France, beautiful, amiable and accomplished, there was every prospect of a brilliant marriage, for she was an acknowledged belle wherever she appeared.

And of all the suitors who sought her smiles there were two gentlemen who seemed to be more highly favored than the rest. And these two were as great a contrast to each other as could well be imagined. The first was a Russian noble, Vladimir Lavine, Prince Peteroski, rich as Croesus, and as handsome as an Apollo. This suitor, all the men declared, would surely win the favor of the girl, but the women pinned their faith upon the second—a dashing American, Franklin Dunbar by name, an amateur artist, a poet, and popularly supposed to be rolling in wealth, like all the Republican princes who cross the seas and dazzle the eyes of the Old World with their lavish display of cash.

In truth, the American was the only rival whom the Russian feared, and with that craft

and fondness for obscure and devious ways so characteristic of his nation, the prince had taken into his pay the waiting-maid of the countess, a lively Swiss girl, by name Nichette.

Behold, then, the waiting-maid and the prince in close consultation. The girl, rather pretty though stolid-faced, and plump in person, and the Russian, a tall, well-built gentleman with blonde hair, parted in the center, after the English fashion, flowing mustache and side-whiskers of the same hue—very noble-looking and distinguished, with only one feature in his face to challenge remark, and that was the eyes, which were strangely variable in color. At times they appeared to be blue, then gray, and then again black. Like the chameleon they seemed to take their tint from the color of the surroundings. If the prince wore a light suit, the eyes seemed to be gray; a garb of neutral colors and blue became the orbs; while a full-dress suit and all the world would swear that the eyes were black.

"So the countess has gone for a drive," the prince observed, upon being admitted to the drawing-room and finding the maid in possession. She was a favored servant, more often treated as a companion than as one occupying a menial position. "Did she go out alone?"

"Madame is with her."

"Oh, by-the-by, you have an exquisite wrist, Nichette; a bracelet would adorn it," and the prince took a jewel-case from his pocket. Opening it he displayed a bracelet almost handsome enough for the countess herself.

The girl was profuse in her exclamations of gratitude as she admired the bauble.

"Tut—tut; speak not of it," he replied, with true princely carelessness. "It is the habit of men of my race to reward well those who serve us; and now tell me, Nichette, what think you, is the countess more or less favorably disposed toward me?"

"It is a shame not to be able to deliver good news to one so noble as yourself, monsieur," the girl answered, with evident reluctance.

"The truth, my girl, is what I wish, no matter whether it be pleasant or unpalatable."

"The American is gaining ground."

"And that means that I am losing."

"She will accompany him to-night to the masked ball at the Grand Opera."

"And she refused my escort on the plea that she did not think she would care to go." The Russian set his white teeth together in an ugly way as he spoke.

"Madame remonstrated with her, spoke of your request, and added that you would be mortally offended; to which she replied, haughtily—'He does not own me, this Russian, yet, and I shall do as I like, whether he be pleased or no. If he likes it not, let him trouble me no more.'"

"Oh, clearly the American has the best of it, and she has a proud tongue, this charming girl, like all her race; and she is not overwise, either—another trait of the Morels, so I am told."

"Ah, monsieur le prince, it lies between you and the American; if you are wise you will know how to act."

The Russian laughed; he understood the covert insinuation.

"*Peste!* this is a dangerous climate sometimes for foreigners," he observed; "but I believe I am acclimated."

At this instant the usher announced:

"Monsieur Franklin Dunbar!"

Nichette retreated from the apartment as the American entered.

The son of the Western Republic was a tall, handsome fellow, splendidly built, with a frame and muscles fit for a gladiator; he had dark-brown hair and eyes, an oval face, regular features, and a bearing at once calculated to win both respect and admiration in any society.

He had advanced into the apartment in his dashy, energetic way, but upon beholding the Russian his manner changed to one of marked reserve; he returned the salutation of the other in the coldest possible manner and seating himself by the center-table took up a book which was upon it.

The Russian was nettled by this coolness, and yet at the same time was rather pleased, since it afforded him the opportunity that he sought.

"Aha, monsieur American, you are looking as well as ever, I perceive," he remarked.

"And why should I not look well, sir?"

"One would think that after such a reverse as you experienced last night—but, perhaps it is not true, one hears so many things nowadays."

"As it is of course impossible for me to know what you have heard, I cannot very well decide whether it is true or not," the other observed, his lip curling.

"Oh, a mere trifle—only that you were regularly cleaned out at the gaming-table, and not only lost all you possessed but were also unwise enough to risk what you did not possess, and that, consequently, this morning you were looking for some secluded spot where you might blow out your brains with ease and comfort."

"And who said this, pray?" the American

asked, apparently calm, and yet with an ugly look in his dark eyes.

"Oh, I never charge my memory with names; common report, let us say."

"Then in this case common report is a liar and men of sense should be careful how they repeat such things, for like the man with the bad piece of money, there is a penalty for circulating as well as for inventing."

This was exactly what the Russian wanted, so he rose in anger and approached the other in a menacing way.

"Take care, sir—take care what you say!" he cried; "I am not over and above patient, and I do not tamely brook insult from any man. But you are young and rash—a boy in years, and therefore, possibly, I should not be too hard with you."

There was a glint of fire in the eyes of the American and his strong, muscular hands involuntarily closed, but for all this there was not a trace of agitation in his speech as he replied:

"Sir, you had best be careful, for we are on the second story here and I warn you that, boy as I am, I am quite capable of throwing you through the window yonder if you provoke me; and if I should do so, it is possible that not only you might be incommoded by the abrupt descent to the sidewalk, but also some innocent passer-by might be demolished, and that would be unfortunate—for the man, I mean."

The Russian was furious; the cool insolence which assumed he was not the other's equal galled him to the quick—the more so that he felt the assumption might be true.

"Monsieur forgets that he is in a civilized land here, and gentlemen do not descend to fisticuffs," the Russian replied, quietly, despite the anger which raged within his heart. "We have swords, though, and when two gentlemen cannot agree it is an easy matter for them to come to an understanding."

"Oh, yes, I comprehend what you are driving at; but, sir, you are too skillful a card-player for me to meet you in a duel."

The Russian turned white with passion, and so overcome with rage was he that for a moment he seemed about to spring upon the American; by a great effort, though, he restrained himself, but when he spoke his voice was hoarse with passion.

"What do you mean, sir? I do not understand you."

"Then you had better not force me to explain; 'Where ignorance is bliss it is folly to be wise.' The quotation is an old one, but in this case it fits admirably."

"I fear that I shall not be satisfied until I learn what you mean."

"To ascertain is an easy matter. For some time past I have perceived that it is your intention to force me into a duel."

"Well, what then?"

"When your second bears to me your challenge I will explain to him that there are certain reasons why I am not compelled to meet you."

"But, Heaven! I will soon put that to the test!" the Russian cried, hoarse with suppressed rage.

"I am not much of a betting man, but I will lay you a hundred Napoleons you won't!"

CHAPTER III.

A DECLARATION OF WAR.

THE entrance into the *salon* at that moment of the countess and Madame de Moissac put a stop to the conversation between the two young men.

With the ladies came the family legal counselor, Martin Chopine by name, an elderly gentleman, very gray and very much wrinkled, thin in flesh and small in stature, with a head that appeared to be too big for his body; in fact, though the idea was ridiculous, at the first glance he strongly reminded one of a huge ape, so odd and peculiar were his face and figure.

But, crooked as was his body and laughable the appearance of his face, there was no better lawyer in France than blunt and honest Martin, and no more upright man.

For years and years the Chopines had been the family lawyers of the Morels, son succeeding father, as generation followed generation.

The countess came first, then the old lady, while the lawyer brought up the rear.

Never to the eyes of the two young men had the young girl appeared more beautiful, and in searching the *salons* of Paris through, one would be puzzled to find a more perfect beauty.

Marie Antoinette, Countess Morel, was tall and stately in figure, a very queen in appearance, with the most exquisitely formed limbs and a face wonderful for its regular perfectness. She was a blonde with a wealth of golden hair, which, when released from its bonds, reached to her very knees; her eyes were dark blue, very proud and imperious eyes sometimes, and then again as lustrous and soft as eyes could be.

She was a high-spirited girl, as befitted the daughter of a race whose blood was second to none in France, and yet there were a sweetness

and gentleness in her disposition that won her friends without effort on her part.

Both of the young men rose and bowed as she entered.

Graciously she acknowledged the salutation.

"You will have to excuse me this afternoon, gentlemen," she said. "Monsieur Chopine has come upon important business, and the family lawyer cannot be denied."

The two visitors bowed respectfully to the old gentleman; the fame of the advocate was not unknown to them; and expressing their regret they withdrew.

There was a brief colloquy between the two as they emerged into the street.

"Harkye, sir," said the Russian, "it is plain that you and I shall quarrel, so that it is as well we should not come in contact any more than we can help. If you are wise you will not visit this house again."

"I fear I shall not be wise, then, for I shall most decidedly come, and as often as I please."

"I give you fair warning; so, beware!" and the prince stalked off down the street.

"If that fellow is what I suspect, it will be rare fun to lay him by the heels; but a week or so will tell the story," murmured the American, as he walked off in the opposite direction.

Leaving these two to their own devices, we will return to the ladies and the old lawyer.

They had seated themselves, and Monsieur Chopine had produced a huge pocket-book, full of folded, legal-like looking documents. He was as calm as a man of marble, while the ladies were deeply agitated.

"I do not understand it, Monsieur Chopine!" the countess exclaimed; "your words are full of mystery."

"Because I have not yet had an opportunity of explaining the matter to you."

"But you have said quite enough to throw us into a fever!" the old lady added.

"Oh, madame, if the few words that escaped me have put you in a fever, for heaven's sake, then, send for the family doctor, for something serious will surely happen when you hear all."

"Let us know the worst at once!" the countess demanded.

"A very few words will explain, my dear young lady," the advocate answered; "but I warn you in advance, that it appears to me to be a very serious matter."

"Proceed, proceed, I beg; do you not see that we are dying of impatience?" cried the countess.

"In the first place, then, you are the heiress of your uncle, John de Moissac, Count of Morel. The count was never married, and at his death in the wilds of Florida, massacred by the savages, you, as next of kin, inherited his estate."

"Quite true, but why take up time by stating what every one knows?" asked the young girl, impatiently.

"In order to begin at the proper place, the beginning," replied the old lawyer, with persistent method. "John de Moissac died without a direct heir, and you inherited. For years the count was absent from France; it was believed that he was in America, but no one knew in what part of that great country, or even for certain that he was there, for, after the count's disappearance from France, the first news that came of him was the intelligence of his death. As the family lawyer, it was my business to secure positive proof of that sad event, which I did, and then I put you in possession of the estate. But, now, from the New World wilderness, comes a stranger, an American, who calls himself,"—and the lawyer paused for a moment, while he took a letter from amid the papers in the pocket-book and refreshed his memory with the, to him, odd and peculiar name—"General Obadiah Washington Calhoun. This American comes to Paris on a strange mission, and he tells a strange story. John Morel was his neighbor in Florida, where it appeared the count settled after quitting France, and in the New World the count dropped his title, so that no one knew he was of noble blood. From General Calhoun your uncle purchased a plantation, and cultivated it as carefully as though he had no other means of livelihood. The general had a sister, called,"—and again the advocate referred to the letter—"Palmetto Calhoun, and this lady, in a very short time after his arrival in Florida, your uncle married."

An exclamation of surprise escaped from the lips of the two ladies.

"A daughter was the issue of that marriage—Tampa Morel, she was christened, and, if living, she is now twenty years old, just five years younger than yourself," and he bowed to the countess. "About four years after the birth of his daughter, there was an Indian outbreak in which all the Morel family were supposed to have perished, but it has since been ascertained that the child escaped, and it is believed she was brought to France. By one of those sudden rises in value of real estate common to America the Morel property in Florida is now estimated to be worth fifty millions of francs. The general is also now a millionaire, and he has resolved to devote his life and fortune to the purpose of finding the lost child, and on that quest he has now come to France. Of course this girl—if the marriage of the father

was perfectly legal, and there seems to be no reason to doubt that it was—is the heir to all the count's estate, the property in France, as well as the American plantation. The general is now in Paris and has written me a long letter upon the subject; this is it," and Chopine exhibited the letter to which he had been referring. "He is no fool, this American, and already, in some really mysterious way, he has acquired a complete knowledge of all the count's early life. The only weak point in his case seems to be the possession of the heir. He says that she is living and that there isn't any doubt she will be in his hands within a month; how much truth there is in that statement is for us to discover."

"This is bad news indeed," the countess remarked, after quite a pause. "If the case goes against us, we shall be stripped of everything."

"Ah, yes; but you must not take that gloomy view of it. His case will have to be a very strong one indeed to oust you from the position which you have enjoyed so long," Chopine observed, cheerfully. "These Americans are greatly given to boasting. Now it will be my task to find out how much truth and how much boast there is in this general's declarations before we come to an actual struggle with him. If we find that he is too strong for us, and that there isn't any chance, we will endeavor to compromise; with the fifty-million American estate the heir can surely spare you, her nearest of kin in the female line, the poor estates in France."

"But how will you be able to find out? Will it not be this stranger's endeavor to conceal any weakness there may be in his case?"

"Ah, my dear young lady, you have an acute mind! The task will be difficult, but not impossible, I think. The moment I received this American's letter I realized the greatness of the danger, and took measures to ascertain all about the gentleman."

"But may it not all be a trick—a skillful attempt to deceive us here in France?" the old lady asked. "The story of this foreign marriage may be all falsehood from beginning to end."

"That is possible, but not probable; but I am acting on both theories—that the story is true and that it isn't. I have employed one of the keenest police spies in Paris—a woman who is called La Marmoset, and set her on the track of the American, with instructions to find out all about him, and, if possible, to get at his private papers."

"The Monkey! What a strange name!" the countess was impelled to remark.

"Yes, and she is as strange as her name," responded the lawyer, rising; "but she's the girl for our purpose. She has promised me some news to-morrow, and until then I will say adieu."

And the old gentleman departed, leaving much anxiety behind him.

CHAPTER IV.

THE AMERICAN.

THE masquerade ball at the Grand Opera House was at its height; it was "the" event of the season, and all the notables of the gay queen city of the Old World were present. The music was entrancing, the costumes magnificent, and the jewels displayed really wonderful.

It was a sight to dazzle the eyes of one used from childhood to such scenes; judge, then, of the effect which the brilliant picture had upon the American who had left his home amid the flowery wilds of Florida in quest of the long-lost heiress.

General Obadiah Washington Calhoun was no common man, either, for he had played a conspicuous part in the politics of his native State, and although he could not boast of much education, yet, being a man of great natural shrewdness, he readily concealed the defect. In person he was of commanding figure, with a face calculated to win respect and confidence. Although a man of fifty he showed little signs of age, except that his flowing yellow locks, which he wore quite long after the Southern fashion, were thin on the top of the head; but he had a ferocious mustache and goatee to make up for it, tawny yellow in color, like the hair. In fact, except that he was too fleshy in appearance, he was the typical American of the foreign artist.

The general was in full evening dress, his only disguise being a small black mask which merely concealed the upper part of his face.

Being without an acquaintance in the gay Parisian capital, with the exception of the American consul whom he had called upon for information in regard to the business which had brought him to France, the general did not expect at the masquerade to do more than play the part of a "looker-on in Vienna," for his want of knowledge of the language would prevent him from being much more, so he imagined.

But the general was in for an adventure on this occasion.

He had arrived about ten o'clock and had not been on the floor more than ten or fifteen minutes when a tall black domino, evidently a lady,

though dressed in male attire, as could be seen when the domino swayed aside, and closely masked so that not the slightest glimpse of her face could be seen, glided past the general and in the most deliberate manner possible dropped a pair of gloves at his feet.

Now the American had often heard of the adventures that were to be met with in delightful, wicked Paris, and he was on the alert in an instant.

In the most gallant manner possible he picked up the gloves and touched the arm of the unknown who had halted for a moment, apparently to gaze at the dancers.

"Sir!" said the domino, in most excellent English, turning.

"I beg your pardon, mademoiselle, but I think you dropped this pair of gloves," he said, delighted to find that he could converse with her.

The mask turned and faced him. The features of the unknown were so well covered by the disguise she wore that all that the general could see were a pair of the most brilliant black eyes that he had ever inspected—wonderful eyes that could flame like angry stars with passion's fires or softly melt with love's tenderness, but now the eyes were laughing eyes that fairly danced with merriment.

"Thanks, monsieur, the gloves are mine," and she extended an exquisitely-shaped white hand for them.

The general, with an elaborate bow, yielded them up.

"But," continued the stranger, "monsieur is laboring under a mistake; I am not a mademoiselle, but of the sterner sex."

And this declaration was made by one of the richest and most melodious female voices that it had ever been Calhoun's luck to hear.

The general laughed; he could not help it; for this magnificent creature, with the superb figure, the exquisite hands, the beautiful eyes and the wonderful voice, to attempt to deny her sex was simply absurd.

"Mademoiselle, at a masquerade I presume that any one has the right to proclaim themselves what they please, and it is against the laws of decorum to doubt the assertion, but if you are not a lady then my judgment is at fault."

A low, musical laugh escaped from the lips of the unknown.

"You are not a Frenchman, I can easily see; no doubt you are an Englishman, for stubbornness is the badge of that nation."

"No, mademoiselle, I am not an Englishman, but I am proud to say I am an American."

"An American!" exclaimed the other, in a tone of delight, "a son of that great nation which has flourished like a green bay tree! Ah, monsieur, I cannot explain to you how glad I am to meet you, and I trust that the acquaintance may continue beyond the walls of this place, for above all nations in this world I love the Americans, the children of liberty!"

The general was deeply interested; as he would have expressed it, "By long odds this girl discounted any female that he had ever seen," for that the unknown was a woman, and a beautiful one, too, he felt assured, and she was no common woman either; everything about her bespoke birth and breeding; and then, too, her words of praise affected him, for he was a true American and dearly loved his native land. So in this state of mind he eagerly improved the opportunity which the words of the lady afforded.

"Whether our acquaintance continues or ends here depends entirely upon yourself, mademoiselle. For my part I would be glad to have it continue, for I will own frankly that, although you are a complete stranger, you have interested me greatly."

"Why will you persist in this delusion?" the mask asked, impatiently. "I am not what you think."

"I am too gallant a man to dispute a lady's word, but you dare not show me your face, for it will, I feel sure, contradict what you have said."

"That is impossible here."

"It is easy enough to go elsewhere."

"Will you come and drink a glass of wine with me, then?" the other said, in a way as if she half regretted the words.

"With the greatest of pleasure."

"Come, then, and you will soon be satisfied."

The black domino led the way to the street, and the general followed without a moment's hesitation.

This was exactly the sort of adventure which he had been looking for ever since he entered Paris. Not the slightest thought of fear had he, for he was well-armed and carried no valuables of any consequence upon his person, and if any one had suggested that Paris was often a dangerous place for strangers, particularly those without friends or acquaintances, he would have repelled with indignation any insinuation that he might not be able to take care of himself.

A coach was standing by the curb-stone. The mask, approaching the driver, inquired if he was engaged, and although the speaker took particular pains to speak quite low, yet the general's ears, trained by a frontier life, re-

markably sharp, overheard the speech, and, to his surprise, he found that the voice of the mask had changed in the most wonderful manner; instead of being sweet and liquid in its accents, the voice of a woman, it was harsh and coarse, the voice of a man!

The American was astounded, but for all that determined to go on and see the matter through.

The driver replied that his vehicle was at monsieur's service. Evidently he did not take the speaker to be a woman.

The two got into the coach, the mask last, and the direction given to the driver the American did not catch, and as it was given in French he would not have understood it if he had heard.

Ten minutes' brisk driving and the vehicle halted in a narrow street before a little wine-shop, nothing low or suspicious about the place, only it was small—such a cabaret as is generally supported by artisans.

"Do not judge the place by the outside," the mask remarked. "It is small and cheap, but keeps as good wine as any shop in Paris."

The American entered without fear.

The mask, apparently well acquainted, led the way to a private room, and the general followed.

A bottle of wine was brought.

The mask filled the glasses.

"To our better acquaintance!" exclaimed the general, gallantly, as he drank. The other had dextrously spilled the wine upon the floor unobserved by the American, so that it was an empty glass that he carried to his lips, but the trick was so neatly performed that the general did not perceive it.

"And now, then, let us unmask and look upon each other," the stranger said, in the rich and musical voice which the general would have been willing to swear could not come from any but a woman's throat.

The American's fingers seemed to be all thumbs as he removed his mask; he had become strangely sleepy, all of a sudden.

Then, with uncovered features the other looked upon him. Never in this life was the general to forget that sight!

The face which the mask had covered was beautiful indeed—a woman's face, yet with a very masculine look to it. The hair, which was short, and jet black in color, curled in little crispy curls all over the head; it might be the hair of a man or a woman, and there was a faint line upon the upper lip like the down of a coming mustache.

And as the American gazed, he felt a strange sensation creeping over him; his head began to reel, his breath to come thick and fast.

"Great heavens! is this death approaching?" he cried, as he tore open his shirt at the collar, as if he were strangling.

"You are entrapped, Monsieur American!" the woman or man, whichever it was, cried, triumphantly.

And while the American reeled, fighting desperately against the influence of the drugged wine which he had taken, and the insnarer watched him, a demon-like expression upon the handsome face, a secret panel, high up in the back wall of the apartment opened noiselessly, and in the opening, framed as if in a picture, appeared the head of an aged Indian warrior, feather-decked scalp-lock, full war-paint, and with curious eyes he peered down upon the strange scene below.

CHAPTER V.

THE DETECTIVE QUEEN.

CLOSE by the Quay Austerlitz is a little narrow street where may be found some old stone houses that date back to the time when the Capets ruled in France.

In a little garret of one of these dwelt the woman, the female police spy, to whom the old lawyer had alluded.

After leaving the Hotel de Morel, Chopine called a *fiacre* and was soon deposited on the quay; paying the man and dismissing him, the lawyer proceeded on foot up the little street.

In the lower part of the house, which the lawyer sought, was a little restaurant, very dingy, and dirty, something akin to the obscure drinking-shops immortalized by Eugene Sue in "The Mysteries of Paris."

An old, hag-like woman was the sole occupant of the place when the lawyer entered; she sat behind the counter, knitting, and she cast a suspicious glance at Chopine.

"You are Madame Bouilliant?" he said, and as he looked at the woman he perceived that the name, which evidently was a nick-name, was well applied, literally translated it meaning boiling water. By her face one could see that she was a woman of violent passions.

"Well, what of it?"

"Where can I find Mademoiselle Marmoset?"

"How should I know?" the woman replied, with a glance full of hostility.

"I was told that you could inform me."

"Humph! whoever told you had more tongue than brains."

"It was Monsieur Preval," the old lawyer remarked.

The woman got down from the stool upon

which she was sitting, an entire change in her manner, and she ducked her head, respectfully.

"Aha! that is a horse of another color. Why didn't you say so at first, my good sir? Any friend of Monsieur Preval is welcome to anything that there is in this house."

The name which had operated so like a talisman was that of the chief of the secret police.

"I wish to see Mademoiselle Marmoset, and immediately."

"Upon business?"

"Yes, upon business."

The woman shook her head.

"She is not in a condition for much work; an escaped convict, whom she had run to earth, was so enraged at the prospect of going back to serve out his time at Toulon that he gave that little neck of hers such a twist! She had to put a knife into him or she would have been a dead chicken."

"And did she, single-handed, attempt to arrest an escaped galley slave?"

"Oh, yes, my master; and she clipped his wings for him, too; he'll go back to the stone house to serve out his time, although I doubt whether he'll ever be good for much after the nice little hole that she made in him. Monkeys are ugly things to play with, sometimes, monsieur, you know; they have sharp teeth, and they know how to use them."

"Well, I will see her, at any rate."

"Certainly, monsieur! Here, Peter!"

In answer to the woman's call, a shock-headed boy made his appearance, and the keeper of the cabaret directed him to show the gentleman up to Mademoiselle Marmoset's apartment.

In the garret-room the old lawyer found the police spy, who, although she was a woman, was reputed to be the most expert agent that the police could command in all France—the queen of detectives.

The woman was dressed very shabbily in a loose robe, and was reclining on a poor apology for a sofa when the lawyer entered.

Her head was all bound up so that her features were almost completely concealed.

There was one very peculiar thing about the female spy, and that was she always managed to keep her face hidden. She had been in the pay of the police for nearly three years, and yet Monsieur Preval himself could not boast that he had ever seen her face. As he had often said, he doubted very much if he would have been able to recognize his most valuable agent if he had met her in the street with uncovered features.

Possibly this precaution was a shrewd device on the part of the spy to prevent herself from being known, acting on the theory that by so doing she would not be apt to be so easily recognized when she was on the trail of a criminal, and it is safe to say so successful had she been, since she entered upon her peculiar vocation, that the criminal classes of Paris feared her more than all the rest of the secret agents put together.

The boy introduced the advocate and then withdrew.

La Marmoset, as she was generally termed, did not move from her position upon the sofa, but merely turned her sharp eyes upon the visitor, and the glittering, hollow dark eyes, looking strangely unnatural, were about all of the woman's face that Chopine could see.

Why she had been called the monkey passed his comprehension, for she was not a little woman, but, as she lay upon the sofa, all wrapped up in shawls—well-worn, dirty shawls, much the worse for wear—she appeared to be above the medium height and muscular in proportion.

"Have I the pleasure of addressing La Marmoset?" asked the visitor.

"That is my name."

The voice of the woman was coarse, harsh and discordant, more like the voice of a gross, brutal man than anything else.

"I wish to see you upon a little matter of business. Monsieur Preval advised me to secure your services."

"Monsieur Preval does me too much honor."

"My name is Chopine—"

"Oh, I know you—Master Chopine, advocate, and they say that you are an honest man, but I do not believe it. For a man to be honest in your trade is to starve to death."

The advocate rather opened his eyes at this blunt speech, but he had been warned by the chief of the secret police that he would find this woman detective and spy to be an odd creature, and that to do anything with her she must be humored.

"I certainly am an exception to the rule, then, for I have not starved yet," Chopine replied, good-naturedly; "but to business: I want to employ your services."

"I am in the market, but I'm a dear piece of goods if the service you require is at all important."

"It is important."

"I'll bet a gold piece to a sou that it is something about this American affair," the woman remarked, speaking more to herself than to the lawyer.

Despite his professional caution, which had become like a second nature to him, Chopine stared.

"Oho! I am right, then!" the spy cried, with a grim smile. "It is the Morel case."

"Well, mademoiselle, you are right, and I confess that your knowledge puzzles me. What do you know about it?"

"There is an American now in Paris, General Obadiah Washington Calhoun," and she checked the names off on her ugly, discolored fingers as she spoke them. "He comes from Punta Rosa, Florida, where the red savages live, and he seeks a girl, an heir, Tampa Morel, who is lost, not in the jungles of her native land, where she might be found, but in the wilds of Paris where the chances are a hundred to one against her discovery. You are the lawyer of the Morels, whose fortune this girl's appearance threatens. Bah! is it wonderful, then, that when you, Martin Chopine, come to see La Marmoset on important business she should guess what the business is likely to be?"

"Oh, no; but, how did you know anything about it? Oh, excuse me, perhaps I am putting an impertinent question; possibly it is a professional matter?"

"It is, but no secret. I have been employed by the American to find the child. *Peste!* what am I talking about! The child is a young woman now, of course—as old as I am, nearly."

The lawyer at once guessed that La Marmoset had a weak spot. She wished to be considered young, but from what he could see of the woman—which was not much, it is true—he judged that she would never see thirty-five again.

"About your own age I should think."

The lawyer had learned that a little flattery sometimes works wonders.

"But to find this girl in this great city. It is absurd! no name, no clew. It would be like breaking the bank of a gambling spa; once in a year such a thing can be done, but it is always accident, not skill or design. But, what is it you want? Not to find the girl, I will be bound!" and the female spy laughed harshly at her own wit.

"No, we are not at all anxious to find the girl, but what we want to know is exactly how strong a case this American has."

"Oh, yes; I am no child; I perceive! Ha! ha! ha!" and again the harsh, grating laugh rung out. "You want me to steal his proofs, if he has any—his papers about the girl, and then he will not have any case at all, and this is what Monsieur Martin Chopine wants—the *honest* advocate!"

"No, my child, *no!* You wrong me," replied the lawyer, in his gravest manner. "I do not wish you to do anything of the kind, and in order that you may fully understand me I will explain my position, without reserve. I am the family lawyer of the Morels as my father was before me. I have seen the young lady, Mademoiselle Marie, for whom I am now acting, grow up from childhood. I have as great an affection for her as though she were my own child. Heaven, mademoiselle, has never blessed me with children. The estate which she inherited from her uncle is not a large one. Her uncle, you must understand, is the father of this girl for whom the American is seeking. If the story which the American tells is true—if he has the proofs to back his tale, and succeeds in discovering the heir, everything that she has in the world will be taken from Mademoiselle Marie. At a single blow this delicate, gentle girl will be reduced to poverty, also Madame de Moissac, her cousin, an aged lady who shares with Mademoiselle Marie the small income which is received from the Morel estate. I wish to soften the blow, if it must fall. I wish to ascertain before we enter upon the contest whether the American has any substantial case. If he has we will try and compromise the affair; if he has not then we will fight."

"You wish to know what proofs he has. Copies, then, will do as well as the originals."

"Exactly."

"Very good! I will undertake the task."

"And your fee?"

"Depends upon the trouble the service gives me. It will not be cheap, monsieur lawyer, for I am avaricious."

"We will not quarrel about the price. Come to me when you have anything worth telling."

With an elaborate bow the lawyer departed.

CHAPTER VI.

AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE.

"Ah! you old rat!" and the woman shook her fist at the door as it closed upon the lawyer. "Wait and see who will win this game—your haughty countess or the girl deserted in the streets of Paris, left to perish in the gutter! This affair of Morel is likely to prove a valuable one to me. First, my dear Monsieur Preval has his suspicions that the American is not what he seems—in fine, thinks that he is a swindling adventurer, and that his tale of the lost heir of Morel is all a lie; so he has employed me to find out the truth; but I know already that whether the American is what he pretends to be or not, the girl, Tampa Morel, is no fiction, and that she has been in Paris, although not now to be found; but that is my secret, and Monsieur Preval must not be allowed to share it—at pres-

ent! Then, through his lawyer, the American employs me to find the lost girl, and now comes Monsieur Chopine who wishes to get at the private papers of this American! *Peste!* I am likely to be much involved in this mystery before it is ended."

The appearance of the shock-headed boy interrupted the woman's meditations. In his hand he bore a scrap of paper upon which a name was written.

"A man is below and wants to see you," the boy said, as he handed the paper to La Marmoset.

"Alexander Castiglione!" she exclaimed, her tone now as different from the one in which she had conversed with the lawyer as though she were another person altogether. "How does he look? What is he like?" Her voice trembled and her whole manner betrayed great agitation. "Come! speak quickly, my little man!"

The boy, despite his dull appearance, was a shrewd youngster, and had taken a good look at the man whose message he had borne.

"Like one who is 'in trouble,'" replied the boy, using the thieves' *argot* to describe a man hiding from the police, fearing that he might be arrested.

"Tall, dark, handsome?" and there was a feverish eagerness in the tone.

"Yes; he's tall, and he's dark, but he don't look very handsome; he's all muffled up, and he looks like a man who has had a hard time of it."

"It is the name, but is it the man?" the woman murmured. "Let him come up."

"Take care and have your 'barker' ready," cautioned the boy, with the unnatural wisdom so much beyond his tender years. "Maybe he's a chicken whom you have sent to pass his time away at Toulon, and now he has called to pay his compliments to you on that account."

"Ah! my pippin, trust La Marmoset to look after her precious skin!" and then from behind her the woman took quite a heavy revolver, the hammer of which was drawn back, ready for action.

She held it up significantly, and the boy grinned, displaying his yellow, fang-like teeth.

"You see, my infant, if this gentleman forgets the respect due to a lady, I will administer a leaden pill that will at once teach him manners. So show the gentleman in, my angel, and do not fear that mamma will not be able to take care of herself. If it is an escaped galley-bird coming to settle an account with me, he had better have walked straight back to Toulon, given himself up and have done with it, for there they torture but do not kill, while I do both."

The boy departed; La Marmoset replaced the revolver by her side underneath the shawl, but it was within easy reach.

"Can it be he?" she murmured. "After five long years will he come again into my life? And how do I feel toward this man who has wronged me so terribly? Do I hate him? Ought I to kill him without mercy? Heaven forgive me! I thought I had done with sentiment long ago; I fancied that my heart was so seared by suffering that it had become insensible to either pity or love, but now at the approach of this man who has been the evil genius of my life, my heart throbs as if it would burst."

If the old lawyer could have overheard this muttered sentence he would have been completely astounded, not so much at the words as at the way in which they were uttered, for the voice of the female spy had now become as soft and as musical as the tones of a prima donna, whose silver notes cost golden crowns.

Had this strange woman then two voices, either of which she could use at will?

There was the sound of a man's footsteps ascending the creaking staircase without, the worn wood of which remonstrated strongly against the weight imposed upon it; then came a low tap at the door.

"Enter, monsieur!" cried La Marmoset, in her harshest and shrillest tones.

Into the room came a tall, well-built man, roughly dressed, with a scarf wound round his neck and an old cap pulled down over his eyes. He had the appearance of a dissipated citizen, one of the class who are forever prating about the "rights of man," and who, in times of disorder and violence, are sure to be found foremost in the difficulty.

The caller closed the door carefully behind him; then, turning, faced the woman.

Eager were the looks with which they surveyed each other.

Five years since either had laid eyes upon the other's face, and greatly changed now was the appearance of both.

But the man, with eyes always full of suspicion, had an idea that the woman had so dressed herself as to disguise her identity, and she—had precisely the same idea in regard to him!

In spite of this, though, each was sure they recognized the other.

"So, it as I thought," the man observed, the first to break the silence; "La Marmoset is—"

"La Marmoset!" exclaimed the woman, quickly. "For the sake of all the saints do not

utter the name which once sounded so sweet when spoken by your lips."

"I have no doubt that you think me the most worthless of villains," he said, abruptly.

"And have I not good reason to think so?" she retorted, her voice shrill and unnatural. "Five years ago what was I when you met me?"

"A sewing-girl, living in a far worse garret than this, endeavoring to keep life within you by toiling with the needle. I occupied the adjoining garret."

"And when I fell sick and could work no longer you came to my aid; you nursed me to health again; supported me; I was grateful, for to you I owed my life. I gave you the love you asked. *Mon Dieu!* if you had asked for my heart out of my body you could have had it!"

"And we were happy until we parted, eh?"

"Happy! Yes, it was a fool's paradise; ha, ha, ha!" and she laughed, shrilly. "I say that I would have given you my heart, but I gave my soul instead! If I had not been a trusting child—an idiot, I might have known that I was to be but a plaything for an idle hour and then cast aside forever. The mysterious life you led; you pretended to be a student, studying for a doctor, but you were not; you were hiding in disguise, yet even with all the knowledge I now possess, I cannot guess why."

"You are satisfied then that I deserted you?"

"Did you not leave me without even a parting word, and I waited and watched for you to come back? Watched like the poor innocent child that I was, for not until days lengthened into weeks, and weeks into months, did I dream that I had been forsaken—cast off to die of a broken heart!"

"Will you listen to my defense?"

"Yes, but it is useless to lie to me, for five years have changed me from a child into a woman, and if you lie I can detect it upon the instant."

"Oh, I will speak truth; but listen and judge."

The man helped himself to a chair and went on:

"The story of my life is quite simple and is quickly told. At an early age circumstances made me what the world calls a rascal. The law persecuted me and instead of bending and submitting peaceably to be wronged, I resisted and fought my oppressors with all my might. I became an outcast, but I considered that the world owed me a living, and as mankind at large seemed inclined to deny the debt I resolved to help myself. The result was an arrest and a condemnation to the galleys. Toulon did not keep me, though, but when I again found myself in Paris it was necessary for me to keep myself secluded, else my friends, the gendarmes, would have got hold of me and sent me back to serve out my sentence."

"It was while skulking under an assumed name in obscure lodgings that I met you, and the cause of my abrupt desertion, without a parting word, of the woman I loved can you not guess?"

"The police arrested you and sent you back to Toulon to serve out your sentence."

"Exactly."

"Why did you not send me word? I know enough of the way things are conducted down yonder to understand how that could have been done."

"If a man has money, yes; without money he is as helpless at Toulon as he is anywhere else."

"And you tried to get word to me?"

"Yes."

There was a look in the keen black eyes which showed that she did not believe it.

"A comrade would have done such a favor for a friend in trouble without money."

"True, and so one promised to do for me. He gave leg-bail all right, but was retaken before reaching Paris and killed in the struggle. Of course I knew nothing of it until long afterward. Two years I did duty and then was discharged. I came to Paris and searched for you—"

"I lay on my back in a hospital for incurables, dying of consumption, so the doctors said!" cried the woman, with bitter accent.

"But they lied—these learned men with their big words and their wise looks. It was no disease, but *starvation!* When they gave me medicine I got worse. Then came along a young man, whose eyes were not blinded by the scales of age, whose opinions were not cramped by the iron rules of the school of medicine. He believed me when I said that I was hungry; he did not shake his head and say the poor girl is delirious, like the rest. He gave me what I wanted and I got well. I might just as well have died, though. It is a mystery why we mortals sometimes cling so to a life which is not worth living."

"The riddle is easily read; we are all gamblers at heart, and there isn't any one in this world so poor and so wretched but what secretly believes that fortune will change some time."

"Perhaps that is truth."

"I know it is. Well, to come to the end: I searched for you and you were not to be found."

Then there fell in my way a chance to make a great coup; the risk was as great, too, as the prize, but I was always daring, and I chanced it. My heels were tripped up, though, and again I went to Toulon, a five-years' sentence this time."

"Which you have not served out."

"Oh, no; I think sometimes with the renowned English rogue, Monsieur Jack Sheppard, that the prison is not built that will hold me."

"The cage that the guillotine builds is a strong one, though," reminded the female spy, in her cold, cruel way.

A long breath came from the man's lips, and his face changed for a moment.

"*Sangdieu!* You make a man shiver; and yet I thought that I had nerves of iron; but I have never put my neck in peril yet. Well, when I came from the galleys this last time, and joined my pals in Paris, I heard from them great stories of the female police spy who had arisen, La Marmoset, and they told me that if I could escape Mademoiselle La Marmoset's clutches I had not much to fear from the rest, and so, mademoiselle, I devoted myself to finding out all about you, for it is my theory that the wise rat does well to make the acquaintance of the cat—at a safe distance of course. Judge of my surprise, then, when I thought I recognized in you an old acquaintance."

"And you come here to-day to renew the old friendship so as to 'bell the cat'?"

"Partly yes, and partly no. In the first place I came for an explanation. I wished that justice should be done me, if I was blamed for the past. In the second place I have a scheme to propose to you. The affair is a magnificent one, but I cannot handle it alone, nor is there among my pals in Paris a single one who is fit to play a certain part that must be played."

"Aha! Do you want to entrap me into a plot so that my claws may be cut?"

"Judge for yourself; the stake is fifty millions of francs, and it seems to me that such a prize as that is worth some risk."

"Fifty millions of francs!" and the black eyes of La Marmoset snapped.

Her quick instinct had guessed what was coming.

Then the story of the affair Morel was rehearsed—the story that the female spy knew so well.

The scheme of Castiglione was a simple one. He expressed great doubt that the lost heir would be discovered, and so he proposed to find some foundling, whose birth was hidden in obscurity, and bring her forward as the heir.

"Oho, it is a chance to visit Toulon that you are proposing to me, for, if the trick is discovered, all who take part in it will surely be sent to the galleys."

"I will take all the risk on my shoulders," Castiglione answered. "If you should happen to come across a girl who says that her name is Tampa Morel, and who shows you papers which seem to prove conclusively that she is the heir for whom fifty millions of francs waits, is it your fault if the girl should turn out to be an impostor—are you to blame?"

The woman shook her head; there did not seem to be much risk in this.

"But the girl—where is she to be found?"

"That question is not easily answered, but, in a city like Paris, such a girl as we require ought to be speedily got at. Either one of us may run across her at any moment."

"But, why do you propose to me to take a share in this scheme? Why not work it yourself, and so save a division of the spoils, if the affair is successful?"

"Because your aid is valuable; the American must be tampered with, and his papers examined so that the necessary documents to prove the identity of the child can be prepared; and then, too, who in all France is more likely to discover the lost heir than the keenest detective in the city? The very fact that you present the girl will be half the battle."

"Very true; give me time to think the matter over; come to me in a week and I will give you my answer."

"In one week, then," and Castiglione arose.

"And if I do not decide to join in your scheme I will at least be neutral. For the sake of the old time, and whether your story be true or false, you will be safe from the claws of the monkey."

"La Marmoset, consider well; it is fifty millions of francs, and with such a sum one can live like grandees in any country under the sun."

"Be satisfied!" and with a gesture she dismissed him.

She heard him descend the creaking staircase, and then her thoughts found vent in words.

"Wolves and vultures all scenting the rich quarry! And the heir, the girl—Tampa Morel—where is she? The American alone is her champion, and what chance does he stand? He will be either fooled or killed. He is no match for his foes. And on which side will I range myself? Well, we will see! Would it not be a great surprise while these wolves are fighting if Tampa Morel herself should appear and claim

the heritage that to her belongs? Let me think! Come back to me, memories of my childhood and clear the clouds away!"

She sunk back on the couch, and covered her face with her discolored hands.

CHAPTER VII.

THE NOCTURNAL VISITOR.

THE American had carefully matured his plans before arriving in Paris, and so, after he had entered the Mecca of his pilgrimage, he was enabled to make move after move with the regularity of a practiced chess-player.

First, he called upon the American consul and explained his business, and that gentleman, delighted to oblige a countryman who stood so high in political circles of his native land as the general, entered heart and soul into the affair; besides there was a spice of romance in being connected with a matter in which fifty millions of francs figured.

"You will need a first-class lawyer, my dear general!" the consul had assured, "for, believe me, there will be a deuce of a fight over this fifty millions when your errand is discovered—not so much a lawyer of great abilities, as one posted in the tricks of the trade. From what you have stated, there is no doubt in my mind that your cause is a just one, and that you must win, unless defeated by trickery."

So the consul made careful inquiry, and as the result he advised his countryman to secure the advice and services of Monsieur Jacques Rinot, a lawyer who, in a certain line, was without a rival in all France.

Monsieur Rinot was not renowned for his legal knowledge, nor was he famed as an orator, but for discovering the weak points of a case, or a flaw in the legal documents appertaining thereto, there was not a man in the fraternity who was his equal.

Rinot entered upon the matter with ardor, not only because it was a case after his own heart, for he delighted in these secret and mysterious affairs, but also because a case that involved fifty millions of francs would most certainly afford very handsome pickings.

The opinion of the lawyer was exactly the same as that entertained by the American consul. No doubt the case was a good one; so the opposing side would be more apt to resort to foul means than to fair.

By Monsieur Rinot's advice, the chief of the secret police was visited and the detectives set to work.

Everything was in proper trim and proceeding admirably up to the time of the masked-ball at the Grand Opera House.

On the morning after the ball the general was to call at the lawyer's office, but he did not make his appearance, much to Monsieur Rinot's annoyance, for the advocate was one of the most particular of men. He waited until noon, and dispatched one of his clerks to the Grand Hotel where the American resided.

At the hotel no one knew anything about the general. His room had not been occupied on the previous night, so the chambermaid reported, and no one in the hotel had seen him since about nine o'clock on the preceding night, when he had left the hotel to attend the grand ball at the Opera House.

"These Americans are hard drinkers," mused the lawyer. "Undoubtedly at the ball he made a night of it and is now sleeping off his debauch somewhere."

So anticipating that the general would make his appearance sometime in the afternoon, Monsieur Rinot remained at his office until after five o'clock; but no American came.

The lawyer began to get alarmed. Was it possible that the opposing parties in the suit had taken time by the forelock and already struck the first blow by spiriting the general away?

Rinot could hardly believe that it was so, for, though Chopine was an able lawyer, yet he was hardly the kind of man to resort to such a trick.

"I will give the American until to-morrow morning," the advocate muttered, as he wended his way home. "If he does not appear then I shall believe that there has been foul-play and I will set the police at work."

The morrow came, but no general; then Rinot proceeded to Monsieur Preval and laid the matter before him.

The chief of the secret police was one of those lucky souls who, thanks to influential friends, obtain positions for which they are totally unfit, but what the chief lacked in knowledge he made up in assumption.

He treated the matter lightly, being of the opinion that the American had yielded to the blandishments of some siren whom he had met at the masked-ball, and that, in due course of time, he would turn up all right; but, in the mean time, as a favor to his friend, "dear Monsieur Rinot," he would instruct the police to make a cautious inquiry, and so, thanks to this blundering, much valuable time was lost.

Five days passed and not the slightest intelligence was gained of the missing man; then the lawyer, satisfied that there had been foul-play, insisted upon an open alarm being given.

It was plain to the shrewd man-of-the-law that the Morel affair was at the bottom of the American's disappearance, for a close examination revealed that the general had very little on his person to attract the attention of "professionals." He had deposited his funds in the hotel safe and, on the eve of his departure for the ball, had even relieved himself of the money which he generally carried in his wallet, reserving only about a hundred francs, "to spend on the shin-dig," as he had observed to the clerk. Neither did he carry any important papers on his person, for Rinot's first bit of advice, when the American sought his counsel, was to put his documents safely away, and it had been done.

The missing general was advertised for in all the newspapers, a full description being given and a large reward offered; handbills were also printed and diligently circulated in all the low drinking-shops of the metropolis, the lawyer thus calculating to reach the eyes of a certain large and desperate class of men who are not apt to be readers of newspapers, but would be likely to know something of a case of this kind, if the American's disappearance had been brought about by means of the night prowlers, who, despite the police, managed to exist in the great city.

Rinot had a clerk in his office who was just the man to act as a go-between—a rascal who had once served his time at Toulon, and whom the lawyer, by a skillful bit of legal strategy, had saved from a second journey to that renowned and ancient city. The fellow had sworn that he never again would get into trouble, and as he possessed really marvelous skill with the pen, being not only a beautiful writer but able to imitate at sight almost any handwriting, Rinot took him into his office as a sort of scrub. It was this talent for imitation that had sent Master Robert Camion, as he was called, to the galleys. Through this clerk—the lawyer was enabled to communicate at will with the rogues who make Paris as dangerous as a jungle, filled with wild beasts, to the innocent and unsuspecting stranger.

Camion's mission was not productive of any results. Not one of the night-birds was willing to own that he knew aught of the American.

But an unexpected witness came forward who was able to throw some little light upon the mystery.

This was the keeper of the cabaret to which the American had been conducted.

He said that a gentleman, evidently a foreigner, an Englishman he had thought, accompanied by a well-dressed young gentleman whom he was sure he would be able to recognize if he ever saw him again, had patronized his place on the evening in question, somewhere about ten or eleven o'clock he thought. They had taken a private room, ordered a bottle of wine, drank it and then—*slipped into the street without paying*. Two such respectable-looking customers he had never thought of watching. At first he had looked upon the matter rather as a lark on the part of the two, and felt sure that in time they would return and settle the bill, but they had not come back.

Monsieur Preval and his fox-nosed detectives were up in arms at once. Here was a clew which followed up would surely lead to important results.

The chief, with some of his ablest men, went to the cabaret and examined the room which the two had occupied. A staircase by the side of the shop led to the second story where the room in question was situated; it was a rear apartment, a small room with a single window, looking out upon the yard in the rear of the house. By the aid of the staircase it was easy enough for any one to pass into the street without being seen by the people in the saloon.

Monsieur Preval searched the house from cellar to garret, but nothing in the slightest degree suspicious did he find.

Completely baffled the chief and his force departed.

This search was made under the cover of the night, and quite late, as Monsieur Preval was a great man for working in the dark.

And just about the same time that this fruitless search was being conducted, Monsieur Chopine was taking his departure from the Hotel De Morel, after quite a lengthy call, during which, with the countess and the old lady, he had discussed the strange circumstances of the disappearance of the general in all its bearings.

The old counselor was as much bewildered as any one else by the strange occurrence, and as unable to account for it; and he was annoyed, too, about the matter, for, now that the quest upon which the stranger had come was made public to all by the gossiping newspapers, he was sorely afraid that some one would think he had a hand in the matter. This, however, he kept to himself, for he knew that the countess's pride would be terribly mortified even at the bare surmise.

After the lawyer departed the two ladies retired to rest.

The hotel was a four-storied stone building, with a garden on one side, separated from the

street by a substantial stone wall, the top of which was guarded by iron pickets; a stout gate served as a means of communication between the garden and the street.

The countess occupied the family bedroom—a rear room on the third floor, which for years and years had been used as the sleeping apartment of the head of the family.

The young girl disrobed, extinguished the light and sought her couch, but not to sleep, for the nervous agitation which she had experienced during the last few days had completely unhinged her.

Clock after clock she heard strike, as the hours passed slowly away, turning restlessly from side to side; but at last tired nature rebelled and her eyes closed in slumber.

The clock had just struck three.

Her sleep was so light that the slightest sound disturbed her, and as she dozed she suddenly became conscious of a peculiar noise; it sounded as if one of the windows in the apartment was being slowly and cautiously opened.

The idea that any one could gain admission through the window of a room on the third story of such a lofty hotel as the Palace Morel was in itself ridiculous, and the girl thought that she was in the embrace of the hideous delusion of nightmare, when one suffers the torments of the damned without being able to stir hand or foot.

The sound ceased, and Marie breathed freer for a moment, and then, to her horror, she was sure she heard stealthy footsteps crossing the floor.

The room was not utterly dark, for the moon without was now rising, and the countess felt certain that if she opened her eyes she would be able to see whether there was any one in the chamber or not, but if it had been to save her life she could not unclothe her eyelids.

Then the sound of the footsteps ceased; as near as the countess could judge the intruder had crossed in a straight line from the window to the wall.

The fear-stricken girl hardly dared to breathe, although at the same time she was convinced that it was all a trick of the imagination, and that no such thing as she seemed to hear had been present.

There was a click—a sharp, distinct click as of delicate machinery moving; then quite a pause of utter silence; then a little clang as of iron meeting iron.

This broke the spell.

The countess opened her eyes, and there, in the center of the room, stood a dusky, dim, uncertain figure—whether man or woman, beast, or spirit from another world, she could not distinguish.

She rose to a sitting posture, grasped the bell-cord, which was within her reach, and screamed at the top of her lungs.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FOOTPRINTS.

SHRILLY rung the scream of the young girl out on the still air, and then, yielding to the terror of the scene, the countess sunk back upon her pillows in a dead faint.

The household was alarmed at once. Nichette, the maid, slept in an adjoining anteroom, but when roused from her slumbers by the shrill scream of her mistress, being a thorough coward at heart, she did not dare to proceed at once into the chamber of Marie, but ran across the hall to the apartment of Madame de Moissac.

The old lady, who was a very light sleeper, and had been roused immediately by the cry of the countess, met the girl at the threshold.

Madame always kept a light burning, and so when she opened her door the darkness of the hall was illuminated.

"Oh, *mon Dieu*, madame!" the girl cried, wringing her hands in an agony of fear.

"What is the matter, Nichette?"

"The countess, madame, it was she who screamed!"

"Why did you not go to her at once? Did she not ring the bell to summon you?"

"Oh, yes, madame, but that frightful scream! I am terrified out of my life!"

"We will go at once. Marie has probably been seized with a sudden illness," replied the old lady, who, possessing all the courage of the race from which she sprung, feared no danger. "Put on a dressing-gown, so that you will be able to summon the servants if any assistance is needed."

The old lady had thrown a loose wrapper around her, but the maid, in her fear, had run out into the hall in her night robes.

The servants, who occupied apartments on the floor above, had been roused by the alarm and could be heard moving about, making ready to descend.

Madame de Moissac led the way, passing through the maid's chamber, for upon trying the door of the countess's apartments, it was found to be locked upon the inside.

The door of the passage which led from Marie's room to that of the maid were never locked so that the girl could be summoned when wanted.

Nichette, too, always kept the gas burning,

for she was too much of a coward to even sleep in the dark, therefore when the old lady threw open the doors of the passageway a line of light was thrown into the countess's apartment, where the silence of the tomb reigned.

Madame advanced boldly, but Nichette lingered, pretending to be occupied in putting on her loose gown, glad of an excuse to keep out of the room until the old lady should discover the cause of the alarm.

Madame had provided herself with matches and lit the gas immediately, but when the full flood of light was turned on, nought but the countess in a dead swoon could she discover.

Nichette by this time had ventured into the chamber, and finding that it was not occupied by robbers, assassins or hobgoblins, as she had imagined, proceeded to apply restoratives to her mistress.

The countess revived almost immediately, and sitting up in the bed gazed around her with bewildered eyes.

"What is the matter, my dear child?" Madame de Moissac questioned.

And at the same moment, Jules, the old major-domo, knocked at the door.

"It is I, Jules, mademoiselle!" he exclaimed.

"Do you wish anything?"

"Wait!" ordered the countess; "and, Nichette, my wrapper!"

Pulling on the loose robe the countess sprang from the bed and whispered in the ear of the old lady:

"Madame, there has been some one in this room—some one who came in through the window."

"It is impossible! You must have been dreaming, my dear girl," the old lady replied, in the same cautious tone.

"Oh no, no dream! Do you not see that the window is open, and I am sure that I closed it before I went to bed?"

"Shall I call the servants and have the room searched?"

"That would be useless trouble; no doubt my scream frightened whoever it was away by the same road that he came."

"But, to come in at a third-story window, my child! how could such a thing be possible?"

The two advanced to the open casement and looked out.

The limbs of a large tree growing in the garden below brushed the side of the mansion.

An exclamation of surprise came simultaneously from the lips of both, as they looked out upon the tree; the same thought had come to each.

By means of the branches of the tree it would not be a very difficult matter for an agile climber to ascend the tree, and by the aid of the large limb which brushed the casement to gain admittance to the apartment.

"My child, it is possible, but is it probable?"

"Yes, madame, I am sure of it." Then Marie related all that had occurred.

Just as she had finished the recital the maid, who had been looking about her inquisitively, eager to penetrate the mystery, uttered a shrill cry.

The ladies turned and beheld Nichette standing in the middle of the floor in a tragic attitude, pointing to the carpet.

"What is it?" Marie asked.

"Oh, come here, my lady, and see!"

The carpet which covered the floor of the room was a rich velvet, a flower and scroll-work pattern, quite dark, except that at intervals here and there there were light circles. And to one of these light circles the maid pointed.

No wonder the girl was surprised, for there, on the elegant carpet, was the plain imprint of two muddy feet.

The ladies advanced to the spot, and kneeling down scrutinized the marks closely; after a careful examination both came to the same conclusion. The intruder had first walked across the carpet from the window on tiptoes, and then, satisfied that there was no danger of his being detected, had stepped forward boldly.

Nichette had wonderfully sharp eyes and discovered a fact which had escaped the others.

"Oh, madame and mademoiselle!" she exclaimed, "the wretch was barefoot!"

And, sure enough, the marks did seem to indicate that the intruder was unshod.

"We must have counsel, madame," the countess remarked, as she rose slowly to her feet.

"Yes," responded the old lady, rising also.

"Monsieur Chopine must be sent for the first thing in the morning."

The servants were dismissed, Jules being instructed to summon the lawyer at an early hour, and Nichette was particularly cautioned not to say a word to any one in regard to the mysterious footprints.

Then the household retired to rest again.

Bright and early next morning the lawyer appeared. He was an early riser, and when Jules delivered the countess's urgent message he came at once.

When the events of the night were explained to him he became thoughtful, and it was apparent that he attached a great deal of importance to the mysterious affair.

"This requires a professional man," he re-

marked, and immediately sent a messenger after a certain Jack Doguin, a shabby-genteel gentleman who pretended to be an author, a Bohemian and a genius, but who was in reality one of the keenest-nosed detectives in France—not a public character at all, but a gentleman who only worked on private business.

This party happened, luckily, to be at home, and he came immediately.

He was a little, insignificant fellow, shabbily dressed—in fact about the last person in the world who would have been picked out in a crowd as a noted thief-catcher.

But Jack Doguin, in his way, was a genius, and it only took him about half an hour to come to a conclusion in regard to the mysterious matter.

First he listened to the countess's story, then examined the bed-chamber and the garden.

"Mademoiselle is right," he said, after he had completed his scouting; "there was a man in her apartment last night. He climbed over the garden wall and inflicted a slight wound upon himself when he departed, frightened away in haste by mademoiselle's scream. He was barefooted, and ascended the tree to the window. There was a slight rain early in the evening, and his footprints are plainly to be distinguished in the soil at the foot of the tree."

But this was all that the detective was able to say, excepting that he did hazard the observation that, in his opinion, the intruder was no common night-prowler.

Even the old lawyer was puzzled. Who was the intruder, and why had he sought the apartment in such a mysterious manner?

CHAPTER IX.

THE TWO FRIENDS.

SUCH an unaccountable disappearance as that of the American general was a ten days' wonder, even in the gay French capital. The newspapers made much of the affair, for all the particulars in regard to the general, and the strange quest upon which he had crossed the ocean, naturally came out, and there was something about the case so really dramatic—so enticing to the average Frenchman, who is nothing if not theatrical, that the "Affaire Americaine" attracted a great deal more attention than if the missing man had been a countryman of any other nation.

The story of the fifty millions of francs was told and retold a dozen different times, and now that the news was made public, that Mademoiselle de Morel was threatened with the loss of her estates, there was a great deal of sympathy expressed for her.

Two young men, especially, in their cosy bachelor apartments, in a little street situated in that ancient part of the city of Paris known as the Latin Quarter, and sacred from time immemorial to the students of the gay city, took a great interest in the story of the "Quest of the American General," as the newspapers dramatically headed their florid accounts.

These two young men were of the same race as the man who had so mysteriously disappeared.

With one of them, Franklin Dunbar, the reader is already acquainted; the other was his chum, his bosom friend and constant companion, Harry Gordon.

The two friends were pretty well known in Paris. Both were scions of American families; they had come to the French capital to complete their education; "raised" together in Virginia, they sought the same object in Paris—a doctor's diploma.

This end had been gained, months and months before, yet the two lingered amid the exciting scenes of the great city—the fairest and most fascinating in all this wide world, seemingly in no hurry to cross the ocean and put to practical use the knowledge which they had gained, although both of them were fully qualified to hang out a "shingle" at a moment's notice, as they had "walked" the Parisian hospitals for two years diligently, despite the fact that, at the same time, they were leading the wildest kind of a life, sowing their wild oats with a liberal hand.

Another fact operated to draw the two young men together; their parents were dead and they were their own masters, and although both had plenty of kindred across the sea, yet neither of them were on very good terms with their relatives, and from being friends they had grown to be like brothers.

In monetary matters, also, the circumstances of the two were similar. Their fathers had been wealthy men, but as the sons, in their college career abroad, had drawn heavily upon the parental purse, in their wisdom the fathers had devised a plan to prevent the young men from rushing headlong to ruin when they should be their own masters.

The crafty old gentlemen invested nearly all their wealth in some substantial manufacturing companies, and by will bequeathed the interest only to their sons, the principal to go to the grandchildren!

And so, on their parents' death—the two fathers died within a few weeks of each other—the chums came into some fifteen or twenty thousand dollars apiece and a regular yearly

income amounting to three or four thousand dollars.

The money in bulk the friends soon made way with, for the gaming table is as fascinating and as certain to despoil the player in Paris as elsewhere. And at the time that our story opens, the two, at the end of a desperate week's battle with the urbane gentlemen who preside over the "black and red," found themselves at the end of their tether. The ready money was all gone, and they only had their regular income now to depend upon.

As the Russian prince had expressed it, both had been regularly cleaned out.

"Well, old fellow, this is the end of our bold adventure," observed Gordon, who was a light-hearted, dashing fellow, a little below the medium height, but splendidly built, with a handsome, manly face, well set off with curling dark-brown locks, a little mustache and imperial of the same hue, and a pair of the finest hazel eyes that ever shone in a man's face. "Our esteemed friend, Johnny Crapaud, has relieved us of our surplus lucre, and as a man can't keep on in the way that we have been going for any sixty or seventy dollars a week, which in future will be the extent of our allowance, I think the quicker we get back to the land of the free, and hang our shingle on the outward walls, the better. It is time that we began to ease the ills, and the pockets, of our afflicted fellow-men, and women also."

"You are right, Hal," the other replied, busily engaged with memorandum-book and pencil in footing up some accounts. "I have just made a calculation and I find that I have got about money enough to settle up all my debts, give a grand parting blow-out to the fellows and pay my passage to New York."

"Oh, have you just been going through that interesting exercise in arithmetic? I did it some time ago, and I was careful enough to reserve sufficient funds for those purposes. And now that the matter is understood, when shall we sail?"

"Hold on a moment; there is a little matter that I must attend to first."

"The quarrel with that elegant, cast-iron piece of perfection who calls himself a Russian prince? If I were you I wouldn't waste time with the rascal. For my part I don't believe he is any more a prince than I am, and I feel pretty sure that, prince or no prince, he handles cards in a way no gentleman would. In fine, I think he is a swindler and a sharper of the first water."

"Oh, no, I don't refer to the Russian; I call him the Russian, although I agree with you that he is no more a Russian or a prince than the fellow down-stairs who blacks our boots. He doesn't trouble me at all. I had made up my mind not to allow the man to force me into a quarrel, but I have been thinking the matter over and I have about come to the conclusion that, if he wants blood so badly, he ought to have it. When you come to think about it, it is the same idea as being blackguarded by a coal-heaver in the street whom you happen accidentally to jostle. Of course, as a gentleman, you should walk on and pay no attention to the dirty ruffian, but when you happen to be fully convinced that you can thrash the fellow without the slightest trouble, it is hard to resist the temptation to turn back and give the brute the lesson he so richly deserves."

"You are right, old fellow; prudence and respectability say go on; manhood says go back and show the beast that the men in blouses and baggy pantaloons are not the only ones in the world who have fists and know how to use them."

"Exactly! That is my idea. You have heard this Russian brag of his skill in the use of all kinds of weapons, and relate in how many duels he has figured as principal and come off without a scratch, but always leaving his antagonist prostrate upon the field."

"Oh, yes; the fellow is the champion liar, and I have always felt like telling him so."

"Well, now, I flatter myself I am rather clever both with pistol and sword, and I have just enough of the Old Boy in me to make me feel inclined to cut this fellow's comb and stop his crowing."

"It will be jolly good fun, and I will be your second."

"But the matter to which I referred was not this affair, but concerns the lady of whom we have been reading this morning," and he pointed to the newspaper upon the table.

"The divine countess, eh?"

"Yes; according to these accounts she is now threatened with a law-suit which may cost her all her property. I have long admired the lady, and I have reason to think that I am not without favor in her eyes; therefore why should I not bring matters to a focus very soon?"

"Propose to the charming countess, eh?"

"Yes; if the law-suit against her succeeds and she is stripped of her estates, a foreign land would be much more agreeable to her than her own native country. At any rate, to make the offer now when this misfortune threatens her will at least show the disinterestedness of my affection."

"It is a capital idea, and if I were you I

would put it into practice as soon as possible."

"What do you say to this afternoon?"

"The sooner the better, and I will accompany you, if you have no objection."

"None in the least."

Never in all their lives had the two young men taken more pains with their toilet than when preparing to call upon the countess, and two o'clock in the afternoon found them at the door of the Hotel Morel.

CHAPTER X.

A MOST UNDIGNIFIED AFFAIR.

THE countess had not yet returned from her morning drive, so the porter in charge of the door replied to the young men's inquiries, but as she was expected to return every instant, if the gentlemen pleased they could walk into the garden and enjoy a cigar there, and no doubt they would not have long to wait.

This suited the friends exactly, for, as Gordon whispered to the other—there must be no backing out now.

Into the garden then walked the two, and there, to their disgust, they found the Russian.

The prince was not alone; an army officer, one Captain Roland Fauconnier, an under-sized, rather stout, and gross-looking gentleman, with tightly-cropped hair and an enormous mustache and imperial, was with the prince.

The captain wore the regular undress uniform of the French service and the breast of his tightly buttoned coat was adorned with half a dozen medals, trophies won by the captain on some hard-fought fields. For gallantry in action the Fauconnier stood second to no man in the French service, and yet, in spite of this, it would have been difficult to find a bigger blackguard in all France—even Europe might be thrown in for that matter. A brawler and a duelist, a gambler—most men with whom he played declared a trickster and a cheat, it was really marvelous how he managed to keep his place in the service, although it must be remembered that really everything in France was rotten to the core during the reign of the third Napoleon.

With this captain, Dunbar had already had trouble. The officer, when flushed with liquor one night, had taken it into his head that the American was a pigeon who could be easily plucked—had intruded into his company and had been properly rebuked for the offense.

The captain and the prince were sitting together on a garden seat when the Americans entered, busily engaged in contemplating the tree which had served as a ladder for the nocturnal visitor to the countess's apartment.

The prince had been duly informed by his spy in the household, the apparently innocent Nichette, of all that had taken place, and was discussing the matter with his companion when the two Americans came strolling into the garden.

"*Morbleu!*" cried the officer, when his evil little eyes lighted upon the two; "there are those cursed Americans! *Mon ami*, why do you not pick a quarrel with that tall fellow and drill a hole through that pretty stomach?"

"I will, upon the first opportunity."

"Oh, a thousand fiends! Do you wait for an opportunity? Make one, my dear fellow! That is the way we gentlemen of the sword do. I can tell you one thing—either you get that fellow out of the way or else I wouldn't give a five-franc piece for your chance with the countess, but perhaps you are not anxious for the divine mademoiselle since this news has become public property."

"You refer to the American claimant?"

"Yes; but as he has mysteriously disappeared, no doubt you hope the danger is past."

"Oh, he will leave an heir behind, that is certain; perhaps a dozen of them, and the more there is of them the worse it will be for the countess. But, to tell you the truth, my dear fellow, I am really in love with the girl, and although I am practical enough to admit that a pretty girl with money would be more valuable, in my opinion, than a charming maiden without cash, yet in this case I am hard-hit, and I am determined to have the countess even if she has not a single sou to call her own."

"Get rid of the American then, and as speedily as possible, or else you will not have the chance to win Mademoiselle Morel. There is no time like the present. Zounds, man! can't you see that the fellow does not intend to meet you if he can avoid it? I heard him say the other evening in public that a gentleman was not obliged to go out with a card-sharp, and the observation was meant for my ears as your friend, my dear fellow."

"Do you think so? Well, we must push matters then." Raising his voice so that his words would easily reach the ears of the young men, he said:

"Really, my dear captain, it is a wonder to me that the countess admits such visitors, but perhaps it is as curiosities, objects of interest, you know, barbarians from afar."

"By Jupiter! I never thought of that! Deuced good joke, isn't it? Ha, ha, ha!" cried the captain.

"That is your cue; or shall I take it up?" Gordon demanded, hotly.

"No, no; it is my quarrel, but if the rascal should get the best of it, then avenge me," Dunbar answered. He advanced toward the prince and his companion, Gordon following, and his manner was so full of menace that the two sprung to their feet, the Russian taking a firmer gripe upon the little light cane which he carried.

"Sir, you are a scoundrel and a puppy!" Dunbar exclaimed, addressing the prince.

Despite his usual perfect control, the Russian grew hot with rage and made a violent blow at the American's head with the cane, but Dunbar caught the wrist of the prince and with a single twist disarmed him.

A cry of pain escaped the Russian at the violent wrench, and he essayed to close in and grapple with his antagonist, but Dunbar, seemingly with hardly an effort, pushed him away.

The prince's temper was up now; so, like a wild bull, he rushed upon his foe.

Dunbar, perceiving that an encounter must take place, was in readiness for it. The champion amateur boxer of his college, a few years' residence in Paris had not caused his good right arm to forget its cunning.

So, as the prince rushed upon him, quite ignorant of the art of self-defense, impressed with a single idea—to clutch and strangle his antagonist, the American's right arm shot out with terrible force, the fist landing between the eyes with a shock which made his highness, for a moment, see more stars than he had ever beheld before at a single glance.

As the prince rushed forward, the captain stooped to pick up the cane, and being behind the Russian, in a stooping position, the stroke of the young American's fist hurled the prince backward, over the bent form of the captain, and the two sprawled upon the ground in a ridiculous manner, the French officer fairly flattened to the earth by the weight of the prince, like a gigantic frog.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* my back is broken!" he groaned.

Neither of the Americans could resist a burst of laughter at the ludicrous scene; and a couple of the servants who beheld the affair could not help doing likewise.

The Russian was pale with rage and the captain red with anger as they picked themselves up.

"Oh, you may laugh, you canaille! but before this day is over you shall weep tears of blood!" cried the Muscovite, so convulsed with passion that he could hardly speak.

CHAPTER XI.

THE CHALLENGE.

DUNBAR took a card from his pocket and tossed it contemptuously at the other's feet.

"There is my card, and your messenger will find me at home all this afternoon and evening. My opinion in regard to a gentleman meeting such a fellow as you are I have expressed pretty freely in public places, and no doubt my words have come to your ears; but under the circumstances, since you seem to be longing for blood, I don't mind giving you a chance for your money, if only for the purpose of showing you that you are as little able to cope with me with arms as with the weapons that nature has provided us."

And then, while the prince was picking up the card and the captain was brushing the dirt from his person, and swearing in an undertone that his best uniform was spoiled—no light matter to one not troubled with much ready cash—the two friends turned and left the premises.

"You will postpone your wooing to some other time?" Gordon remarked, as the two emerged into the street.

"Yes; with the prospect of this other engagement on my hands, I think it will be the wisest course."

"I think so myself; not much use of engaging in the afternoon to marry a girl when there's a chance of being killed before midnight."

"Not much! I presume there isn't much doubt his second will wait upon me this afternoon, and probably arrange for the affair to come off to-night. There is a full moon, therefore night will serve our purpose as well as day."

"From what I have seen of the man, I fancy he will want to hurry the matter before his rage has time to cool. I think he is just the kind to crawl out of an affair of this kind if he had time to reflect over it, unless all the odds were on his side."

"Just what you must look after. As my second, you will have to arrange the terms of the duel, and you must be careful that this rascally captain does not come any tricks over you."

"Well, I don't profess to be very expert in this sort of thing, but if he gets the best of me, I'm willing to be shot for a yaller dog, that's all."

"We have the choice of weapons, you know."

"Yes, of course, as the challenged party; so we have the advantage, and I intend to make all out of it I can. But, I say, in regard to the countess, you are withdrawing and leaving your rival in possession of the field."

"Oh, no; you are wrong there, for, unless I

miss my guess, he will not tarry; his personal appearance will not be calculated to win him a fair lady's esteem. If he don't have as fine a pair of black eyes as ever a man sported, then my knuckles are not as hard as I think they are."

And it was as Dunbar anticipated; the blow administered the Russian had marked him in a frightful manner.

After the departure of the two Americans the prince broke out in a storm of curses.

"I ought to have known better than to have exposed myself to the fist of this fellow!" he cried. "The John Bulls and their cousins, the Americans, are all boxers from the cradle."

"You are right; it is foolish to fight with them with fists; but, my dear prince, you must get out of this before the countess comes; your face is really too horrible, and if she should once catch sight of it I do not believe she would ever care to look at you again."

"Yes, yes; call a *fiacre* and I will go to a doctor and see if something cannot be done to remove the marks."

The medical man was visited, and he, after treatment, gave the cheering assurance that within three days the bruises would be so reduced that a skillful artist, who made a specialty of such cases—and he gave the man's address—would be able to paint them over, so that they could not be discerned.

On their way to the hotel the approaching meeting was discussed. There was now no doubt that the American, despite his former avowal, had determined to fight if he was challenged.

The prince was for having the meeting take place that very night, but the wily old army officer argued against such a thing.

"Allow yourself time, my dear fellow; the American has the choice of weapons, you know, and who can tell what outlandish tools he may select? By postponing the meeting for, say three days, you give yourself time to make yourself familiar with the weapon, no matter what it is."

"Suppose he chooses double-barreled shot-guns, which I believe are favorite tools with these American barbarians?"

"Oh well, I should not agree to any such weapon as that. It must be one commonly in use among gentlemen."

"Well, have it your own way," the Russian assented, sulky, as most headstrong men are when not allowed to have everything to their liking.

At five that afternoon the captain made his appearance at the lodging of the Americans.

"I have the honor to represent the Prince Peteroski," he remarked, with a most elaborate bow, after he had been admitted by Gordon. "His highness, the prince, has commissioned me to demand satisfaction for the affront which you put upon him to-day."

"I am quite ready to give your principal all the satisfaction he desires," Dunbar replied, with cold politeness. "Mr. Gordon here will act as my second, and with him you can arrange the details of the meeting."

Dunbar then quitted the apartment.

Gordon placed chairs, invited the captain to be seated, tendered him cigars, one of which the Frenchman accepted with satisfaction, for he saw they were worth two francs apiece by the box. Not often he got a "weed" of that description.

The cigars lighted the two proceeded to business.

"I presume that neither yourself nor friend have had much experience at this sort of thing—these affairs of honor, I mean," the captain began.

"Oh, you are out there; my principal has figured in twenty or thirty of these affairs as best man, and in a hundred at least as a second, and for myself I reckon I am not far behind. In Virginia, where we come from, we usually have one or two of these little pleasantries a week just to make things lively in the neighborhood. You see, we live in a rather dull place, and when we want a ripple of excitement, we sally out and horsewhip the nearest neighbor. Why, I have seen eight or ten men all standing up in a line ready to take a crack at each other before breakfast, and it wasn't a very good morning for dueling, either."

The Frenchman stared; the statement was too much for him to credit, but it was told with such apparent candor that the captain set Gordon down for being the most magnificent liar he had ever met.

"Humph! Well, I am glad to hear that your friend is not a novice, for the prince, being one of the most accomplished duelists in Europe, would much prefer to meet an antagonist who can take care of himself. He generally kills his man and he doesn't like to be accused of slaying greenhorns."

"Make your mind easy on that score, and, as friend, let me advise you to warn his high mightiness to settle up his earthly affairs, for after the duel is ended he will not be in condition to order his own coffin."

"You speak confidently!" said the captain, nettled.

"It ten to one that he'll be plugged. In

fact, if you feel like betting, I will lay a hundred Napoleons to ten that my man wings your man at the first crack!"

The Frenchman, thus beaten at his own game, stiffly declined to bet.

The arrangements were speedily made: hair-trigger dueling-pistols, the regulation article; distance thirty paces; place, the Bois de Boulogne; time, nine o'clock P. M., three evenings later—the principals to be accompanied by the seconds and a surgeon for each antagonist.

Then the captain withdrew, not at all easy in his mind. The American's readiness was very suspicious.

CHAPTER XII.

TANGLED THREADS.

NEVER, throughout the whole course of his long professional career, had counselor Chopine been concerned in any affair that puzzled him as much as this mysterious Morel case.

The disappearance of the American; and then the midnight intrusion to the countess's apartment; were they in any manner connected? Robbery did not seem to be the motive of the visitation, as the man had not prowled around the room in search of valuables, as a common night plunderer most certainly would have done. But, what motive was there for an enterprise carried out at the risk of life, for not only might he have been shot in the room, but at the slightest slip in the ascent of the tree, or in the dangerous leap from the branch to the window-sill, the climber must have been precipitated to the ground beneath.

In his perplexity the lawyer thought of the Detective Queen, from whom, as yet, he had not had any report. With great confidence in her quick wits he determined to seek her at once, so he tied to the humble restaurant of Madame Bouilliant.

La Marmoset was at home, and, when the advocate sent up his name, gave orders for him to be admitted.

The woman was stretched out on the sofa as usual, with her face all tied up, so that very little of her countenance could be seen.

"Got the face-ache," she explained, in answer to the lawyer's inquiring glance, as he helped himself to one of the rickety chairs.

"Well, have you made any progress?"

"About what?"

"The American, of course."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the woman.

"Why do you laugh?"

"How can I make progress when you hide the man away from me?"

"I hide him away?"

"Of course it is you! Who else?"

"But, my dear La Marmoset, talk sense. I haven't had any hand in the man's disappearance. Why should I have?"

"Who else in Paris has any interest to make away with the American but you, acting for your client, the Countess Morel? The American alive threatens her estate; the American dead the danger is avoided!"

This plain speaking both annoyed and wounded the old gentleman.

"My dear child, you ought to know me better than to level such an accusation as that against me. You have been acquainted with me for some time, you have acted as my agent in some very delicate cases—very delicate, indeed; now, did you ever know me in these secret affairs, even when I knew that I could rely upon your discretion as upon my own, to adopt any mode of practice that would not bear inspection?"

"Oh, no; I believe you are an honest advocate, if there is such a thing in the world; still, you are only a man, and the temptation in this case was great."

"Not great enough for me to stoop to murder, or even to kidnapping," Chopine replied, in his gravest manner. "I will admit that I did proceed in this particular case in a rather underhand way, for I had a suspicion—which I did not even confide to you, for I wanted you to proceed on your task without being biased in any way—that the American was an impostor, and his story a trick to extort money from the countess. I therefore thought I was justified in fighting fire with fire. And you greatly wrong the lady I represent, also; not for fifty hundred millions of francs would she do anything but what was strictly and purely right. If the claim of this unknown heir is a good one she will not contest it, but will yield the property without a struggle."

"Ah, she must be an angel, this dainty countess!"

"She is, my dear La Marmoset," the lawyer responded, seriously; "she is an angel, if there ever was one on this earth. I have known her from childhood, and a sweeter, kinder soul does not exist."

"And why should she not be amiable, this dear countess?" retorted the spy, in a spiteful way. "Rocked in a jeweled cradle, fed with a golden spoon, every wish complied with almost ere it was spoken, why should she not be a jewel of a woman? Oh, *mon Dieu!* how different our lots are in this world! If she had been brought up in the gutter, as I was, fed

upon crusts, fighting with the vagrant dogs and cats in the street for my very bread, old and wrinkled before I was really young, then if she was good and amiable she might have something of which to boast. Bah! Any one can be good and honest and virtuous if they are never tempted to be otherwise! Compare her existence with this lost heir, the child who was carried away when barely more than an infant, by the savages, then rescued from them by a Frenchman who had dwelt so long in the jungle that he was almost a savage himself, and afterward lost in this great wilderness of houses that we call Paris. Why, this lost heir, if she is living now, must be some such creature as I am—withered, faded, haggard, old before her time, dragging out a miserable existence!"

The lawyer was astonished; never before had he seen the woman so strangely affected.

"Our fates are as the great God above rules," he said, "and it is our duty to make the best of the position in life in which we are placed."

"Very true, but I get the blues once in a while!" responded the woman, a complete change in her manner, falling again into her old, careless way. "Well, to come to business, I haven't been able to do anything. The American's mysterious disappearance upset my plans, and I will own I came to the conclusion that you had a hand in the abduction."

"No, but who had?"

"Find a motive first for the deed; that was Vidocq's counsel always."

"It is difficult to see who can profit by the act."

"I will try and look into it."

"And now, here is another matter to submit to you." And Chopine told the story in all its details of the intrusion into the countess's bed-chamber.

"No common trick that; some deep motive at the bottom!" the spy declared. "I know the very man to look into it—a fellow as sharp as a ferret. I will send him this afternoon on some pretext so that his business will not be suspected, for, who knows, there may be some one *within* the mansion mixed up in this matter. A locksmith! the very thing. The countess requires new fastenings upon the doors and windows. Mind, not a single soul within the house must know the errand of this man—not even the countess, nor the old lady, her companion."

"Yes, yes; I can arrange that."

"You will tell your angel that you think the locks had better be carefully examined. My man is perfection itself; he can handle a tool with any mechanic in Paris. The clang of that iron door that the countess heard was *not* imagination. The intruder came to open that door, and when we discover what and where it is we shall have a fine clew to work upon. My pretty boy will find that door within an hour, no matter how skillfully it may be concealed. The Hotel de Morel is a very old building, and the old-time palaces were full of secret passages."

Feeling satisfied that something would come of this the lawyer departed.

"Nearer and nearer; soon the time will come!" the woman muttered.

CHAPTER XIII.

M. PELOTON'S RETREAT.

THE Seine is a charming river; the average Frenchman swears that there isn't another stream in the world to compare with it, and probably it was for that reason Monsieur Pierre Henri Louis Peloton, when he looked about him for a charming spot whereon to found a peculiar institution, thought of a certain old stone mansion just below St. Denis, with grounds running back to the Seine.

An acre of ground attached to the house had been a flourishing garden, but neglect had transformed it into a wilderness, and the trees and shrubbery had grown so luxuriantly that the mansion could hardly be discerned from the river.

Pierre Peloton, or Professor Peloton as he always termed himself, was a peculiar man who had led an eventful life with more ups and downs than fall to the lot of the average man. He was a Switzer by birth, and at an early age had drifted to Paris. He had blackened boots in the streets, exhibited white mice, been a tiger for an English milord who turned out to be a runaway banker's clerk, then, as he grew to man's estate, had served as hostler in a stable, traveled with a wandering circus, ran a puppet show, and was in connection with a gang of pickpockets who operated on the wallets of the crowd attracted by the exhibition. This was a lucrative thing while it lasted but the meddling gendarmes soon put a stop to it. Twenty different trades and callings had the Switzer followed with very little success, when a lucky chance got him a position as an attendant in a lunatic asylum. Here he remained for three years and at last saw his opportunity. Being a man of gigantic size he had been put in charge of the department where the most dangerous and refractory lunatics were placed, and with these unhappy creatures he got along splendidly. No madman, no matter how violent, ever succeeded in getting the best

of the gigantic Swiss, who was as strong, seemingly, as an elephant.

And from daily contact with the unruly madmen, from whom the ablest doctors retreated in alarm, Peloton got the idea into his head that he knew a great deal more about insanity than the savans who employed him, and he reasoned that, if he could only succeed in setting up an asylum where only the most dangerous and violent patients would be received, the very class that the regular asylums preferred not to take, a fortune might be made.

There was a dame in the next street who had a little drinking-shop, much frequented by the attendants of the asylum—a woman of a stature almost equaling that of the Switzer, and who was reported to be worth a trifle. Upon this lady Peloton had cast a longing eye, for he fancied that she was just the one to assist him in his enterprise. She had the "chink," if report spoke true, which he lacked; she had the courage, too, and the personal strength necessary in carrying on such an affair.

The dame was easily won, for to her mind the scheme appeared to be full of golden promise.

The old secluded chateau by the banks of the Seine was secured and fitted up, and from the first the Retreat of M. Peloton flourished.

The Retreat was like a living tomb to all those unfortunate souls consigned to its care. Professor Peloton did not pretend that he cured; he only kept.

In brief, the institution was one of those private mad-houses which are the disgrace of every community wherein they are permitted to exist.

Not that the professor was not careful to keep within the letter of the law, for, neither he nor his amiable dame had the least desire for a sojourn at Toulon, but to evade the requirements of the code was an easy matter with such an unscrupulous rascal.

The Retreat rarely had over ten or a dozen patients, but at the prices the professor charged that number was quite sufficient to pay him handsomely. And, from the peculiar way in which he carried on the institution it would not answer to have so many inmates that a large force of attendants would be needed to take care of them, for such attendants as Peloton required cost money, and even then were not easily to be procured. The first qualification which the professor desired in the servants was the faculty of minding their own business.

Once in a while a peculiar case would come to the Retreat, when it was almost necessary that all connected with it should be almost blind, deaf and dumb, and such patients as these were the very ones out of whom the institution made its money.

These cases were very hard ones to manage at first, for all of them, laboring under the natural delusion common to the insane, imagined that they were restrained of their liberty by unlawful means, and a great many accused their nearest and dearest relatives of being in a conspiracy to shut them up away from the world.

Of course there are always busybodies who would make trouble if these ravings were known.

And now, having described the institution over which "Professor" Peloton presided, we will proceed to relate why it is introduced into our tale.

It was night and the master and mistress of this "home" for the insane, sat in their reception-room, enjoying a glass of wine and indulging in mutual congratulations over the success of their enterprise.

"Ten more prosperous years like the last and we shall be able to retire to a chateau and set up for gentle folks, my love," said the professor, rubbing his huge palms together gleefully.

At this moment a servant entered with the intelligence that a gentleman desired to speak with the proprietor of the Retreat.

"Aha, maybe a new patient? We have just room for one more. What is he like, Jack?"

"An English milord, I think, sir—very well-dressed—a great deal of jewelry—a big dog's head with diamond eyes for a scarf-pin."

"A client then—if he be a client; something out of our usual line; show him in."

"I will retire until he goes," said Madame Peloton, quitting the apartment.

Jack ushered in the gentleman, then discreetly retired.

At the first glance the master of the Retreat saw that the servant's guess was correct; there was no mistaking the nationality of the visitor, for "John Bull" of the most pronounced type stuck out all over him.

In person he was a little under the medium height, but rather stoutly built; he had curly, flaxen hair, cut short, and flowing mustache and side-whiskers of the same hue, which, with his bushy flaxen eyebrows, gave him a poodle-dog-like expression.

"Haw! Speak English?" he asked, using his own language.

The professor shook his head; he could master French, German and Spanish pretty well, but the barbarous tongue of perfidious Albion was too much for him.

"Well, I can patter French a bit, although I

s'pose I make a beastly fist at it," the visitor remarked, speaking now in French, and really, for a foreigner, he did pretty well.

"Monsieur's accent is perfection!" Peloton cried, with true French politeness.

"Oh, come, none of that! No humbug, you know, for of course you put it all down in the bill. Well, mossu, I've got a patient I want to put in this crib of yours. He's a strapper, too, and a plagued hard nut to handle."

The professor smiled and held up his big fist which resembled the butt end of a leg of mutton.

"Do not fear, milord; my system consists of opposing force with force; the patient is violent, good; I am more violent, better. I conquer him; you perceive?"

"Oh y'es, I have heard your place and your system highly spoken of by a lot of fellows who generally know what they are talking about, and that is why I came to see you when this chap got so violent that there was no living with him. I can hold my own, you know, pretty well with an ordinary man, but this fellow is a perfect stunner, a blooming bloke, you know; he could give me a stone or two and best me easily if he was himself, but when he gets in his tantrums now he is a regular beastly devil."

"Have no fear, milord; I take charge of such cases myself. Boast I do not, but I have held a wagon against a thousand-pound horse. Insanity is a sad affair," and the rogue shook his head. "Is it milord's father that is afflicted?"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE PATIENT.

THE Englishman put up his eyeglasses and stared at the host for a moment, as if astonished at the question.

Peloton saw that he had made a mistake.

"Ah, it is not milord's sire!"

"Oh no, bless you! That old fellow was comfortably packed away long ago."

"I have had such cases, milord, you know. An old man in his second childhood, incapable of reasoning and yet obstinate enough to make a great deal of trouble. He is placed here; we take the best of care of him; no one pays any heed to his foolish notions, and it is much better than if he was out in the world to make trouble."

"Oh yes, I see; a very comfortable arrangement, particularly for the kid who is anxious to get the handling of the parental shiners."

The Frenchman smiled; the Englishman had caught his meaning.

"But, I say, do any of your men speak English?"

"I regret to say, milord, that English is to us an unknown tongue."

"But, how will my chap get along then? You won't be able to understand him, and he won't understand you."

"So much the better," replied the professor, in a very significant manner; "I will take care that his wants are supplied, and that is all that is necessary. In fact, my dear monsieur, with one exception all my attendants are deaf and dumb. You will perceive that in an institute like mine it would be at times very inconvenient to have servants who might listen to the meaningless ravings of the patients. Some of the delusions patients entertain appear so like truth, that only a man educated with the insane would not be deceived. No doubt the gentleman in whom you are interested labors under some idea that you would rather all the world should not know?"

"Oh yes," answered the other, readily, "the old buffer used to be my steward, had charge of my property in England, you know, and my plantations abroad, and while he was away looking after these plantations some fellow led astray his daughter—a deuced pretty girl, you know, whom he left behind him in England. Well, she was a cursed idiot, like all the women, and, what does she do but go and throw herself into the river—made a deuced unpleasant corpse of herself."

"I see, monsieur; the rest of the story is plain to me; when he returned and discovered what had happened the shock overturned his reason," said the professor, the most profound sympathy in his manner.

"By Jove! old fellow, you have hit it off as nicely as though you had been there!"

"Ah, monsieur, we have so many similar cases, and no doubt now, in his delusion, the unfortunate man blames you for the sad event."

"By George! you've hit it again; and it is all such deuced rot, you know. I don't believe I ever saw the girl ten times while he was gone."

"It is one of the commonest freaks of the insane, milord; they always hate and seek to injure those whom in reason they loved the most."

"Of course a report like that about a fellow is deuced awkward if it once gets round, and I don't really believe that my life would be safe with the man at liberty."

"No doubt, no doubt; it is a charity to put the poor creature where he will be well taken care of; and milord may rest assured that the most perfect secrecy is preserved in regard to any of our patients' crazy fancies; and then,

too, the fact that no one in the establishment speaks English, and the gentleman not being able to converse in French, it will be clearly impossible for any trouble to occur on that score."

Then the Englishman asked the terms, and the professor putting a pretty stiff price on, there was some haggling for a few moments, but finally the bargain was made.

Paul Tomjohn, the visitor gave as his name, but, despite this plain appellation, the professor persisted in milording him. On the Continent, where the Switzer had picked up his education, every Englishman is a lord, or at least if not, he is made to pay like one.

The patient was called John Smith.

The details arranged, Peloton asked when he might expect the new boarder.

"To-night, if you are ready to receive him."

The professor assured him that the patient could come in five minutes if milord so pleased. The good round sum which the Englishman had plunked down, inspired the Switzer with a deal of respect for the stranger.

"Let me see," said Mr. Paul Tomjohn, "if I mistake not your grounds run to the river?"

"Yes, monsieur."

"He is in Paris, only a few miles off; how would it do to bring him down the river in a boat?"

"Excellent, the very way, monsieur."

"I think that will be better than to bring him by day; his entrance here being unobserved, will not excite remark."

"Very true; it is a grand idea."

"It will take me some time to get back to Paris; then, to engage a boatman, embark the patient, and pull down the river—it will be midnight before I can arrive."

"What difference does it make, milord? I myself will be on the look-out, and if you do not arrive until an hour or two after midnight it does not matter."

"Display a light as a signal so that I will know where to land, and about midnight expect me. It will be a deuced jolly trip for the old beggar."

And then milord Tomjohn took his departure, the professor accompanying him to the door with the most obsequious politeness.

The Englishman had produced a most profound impression upon the old scamp—a fact which he confided to his wife when relating the particulars of the interview.

"He is a deep one, my ducky," Peloton observed. "He looks soft, but he's got an eye like a gimlet. That is the kind of customer I like to deal with. No fool, although he looks like one, and the man in this world who gets the best of milord Tomjohn, must get up early in the morning."

Ten minutes before midnight Peloton and the madame, he with a lantern, took their station, at the foot of the garden, where the ever-moving tide of the Seine hurried onward to the ocean, and twenty minutes past twelve the sound of oars was heard from the darkness upon the bosom of the river.

Soon a light boat shot out of the gloom and approached the shore.

A single man occupied the boat, apparently, and he was plying the oars. It was the young Englishman; but when the boat came near, the watchers saw a dark mass like a sleeping man stretched out in the stern.

The bow struck the beach and the Englishman leaped out lightly.

"Extinguish the light!" he exclaimed, hurriedly. "I think that I have been followed!"

In a twinkling the light disappeared.

"A boat?" Peloton asked.

"No, by a man swimming clear from the Pont Neuf!"

"Oh, impossible! No man could swim so far and keep up with a boat."

"It was either a man or a fish as big as a man. It doesn't matter, though, except that I would like to know what is the game. Lend a hand here, for my man is sleeping."

But, as Peloton bent over the prostrate form, the peculiar odor that the sleeper emitted revealed to him that the patient was not sleeping but dosed into insensibility.

CHAPTER XV.

A CLEW.

CRAFTY Jack Rinot was at his wits' end. Ten days had elapsed since the mysterious disappearance of the American and not the slightest trace of him could be discovered, although the lawyer, as stated, had taken upon himself the responsibility of offering a handsome reward and had employed half a dozen private police agents.

And Monsieur Preval, the head of the police bureau, spurred onward by the taunts of the press, had taken unusual pains but without avail.

Attracted by the large reward offered, there had been twenty people to see him, all with theories as to how the American had been spirited away, but the lawyer did not want theories; he demanded the lost man or knowledge of his whereabouts—dead or alive.

As a last resource the lawyer and the chief of police had circulated a placard offering not only a fine reward for any information that

might lead to the discovery of what had been the fate of the missing man, but they also promised a pardon to any one concerned in the affair, provided he made a clean breast of it and denounced his accomplices, stating also that the strictest secrecy would be observed so that no one could know who had been the informer.

This was the favorite trump-card of the police chief, and as a general rule it won the game; for few rogues are there who will not at some time or other betray their comrades, provided the inducement is sufficient and there is a chance that their treachery will not be discovered.

Two days had passed, though, since this offer was made and no one had come forward to "squeal" upon his pals.

Rinot had just returned from an interview with Monsieur Preval wherein the chief expressed the opinion that the fate of the American was a mystery not likely to be solved.

In despair the lawyer had seated himself to meditate, when a tattered youth, miserably dressed, and whose tangled jet-black hair and dark skin proclaimed him a foreigner, came slouching into the office.

Rinot was alone, the clerks being all absent, and thinking from his appearance that the boy was a beggar, he told him sharply to withdraw; but the lad fumbled with the hem of the coarse and ragged blouse, and made an awkward bow.

"Monsieur Rinot, the advocate, if you please," he said. The voice was hard and coarse, the face dull to stupidity, yet there was a cunning look in the bright black eyes.

"Well, what of Monsieur Rinot?"

"I want to see him, if you please." The boy spoke tolerably good French, although with a decided foreign accent.

"I am Monsieur Rinot, the advocate; what do you want?"

The boy grinned.

"Can I speak and will no one hear?" he asked.

"Speak freely; no one will hear you but myself."

"Is it all right and no trickery about the reward, and will nothing be done to the fellow that tells?" the lout questioned, earnestly.

Rinot almost started from his chair in surprise. Was it possible that he was going to get upon the track, after all?

"Sit down, sit down, my man!" he cried, hardly able to restrain his impatience. "Do you know anything about the matter?"

"Yes, I think I do," the Italian replied, for Italian he evidently was, edging himself cautiously into a cushioned arm-chair as though he was afraid it would bite him if he sat down upon it roughly.

"Don't be afraid! Speak out! tell all you know; you have nothing to fear if you make a clean breast of it even if you struck the blow that killed the American."

"Oh, monsieur, I never did the deed!" the boy exclaimed, with a scared look.

"Certainly not; one can see that with half an eye; but, what do you know of the matter?"

"My name is Carlo, and I come from Genoa," said the lad—"Genoese Carlo, the padrone calls me; I belong to the Italian colony of rag-pickers that dwell near the Quay of Austerlitz."

"Yes, of course, I know, I know!" cried Rinot, eager to hurry the communication, although to tell the truth he had never heard of the Italian colony of rag-pickers.

"The padrone, Black Angelo, the wolf, read one of your handbills aloud last night after supper and he said that he wished it was his luck to be mixed up in such an affair, for there was much gold to be made out of it; then, all the men talked the matter over; I listened, heard the whole story, and then, though I said nothing, I began to think that I knew something about it."

"Yes, yes; that was wise and prudent; never share valuable secrets with any one; go on!"

"But I am not to be punished for what I have done?"

"No, no; you have my word for that."

"You know the cabaret into which they say the American went with the stranger in the domino, and from which no one ever saw him depart?"

"Yes."

"And do you know the cabaret of Madame Bouilliant in the little street that leads from the Quay of Austerlitz?"

"Certainly."

"One faces that way and the other faces this way," and with the dirty fore-finger of his right hand he drew a diagram on the equally dirty palm of the left hand. "The two cabarets are some distance if you walk from front door to front door, but at the back the yards join and only a low fence separates them."

"Exactly; I see."

"There is a little gate by the side of Madame Bouilliant's house which leads from the yard into the street. In the back yard of madame's there is a little grated window which looks into her cellar—the cellar where she keeps her wine. I love wine—it warms one up so, when one is cold, but I am too poor to buy it for the padrone takes all the money, so when a dark night

comes I dodge through the passageway into the madame's yard, and with a wire ending in a running noose I fish through the grating for madame's wine. You understand, monsieur, in the corner of the yard by the window it is very dark, when the moon isn't out, and one can't be seen if they are careful."

"Certainly; go on!" encouraged the lawyer, all ears.

"One dark night some time ago—it was the night that the masked ball was at the Grand Opera House, for I was there early in the evening to see the great folks go in and staid until I got tired and thirsty for some of the madame's wine, so I went and fished for it, and while I was fishing, a window on the second story of the other cabaret opened, and two men stood there; then they got through the window and descended to the shed without. It was easy to drop, after that, from the shed to the ground over the fence into Madame Bouilliant's yard, then out through the passageway into the street and down the street until they stopped at the third house from the quay. It is an old house, and they say that no one lives there, but the men went in, for I watched them, curious to see what they were up to, for the big man staggered and rolled as he walked yet did not seem to be drunk! And now what do I get?"

"Francs enough to make you open your eyes if you have given the police a clew. Remain here until one of the clerks comes in and tell him to write down where you live so that I can find you when you are wanted!" And seizing his hat away the lawyer ran.

CHAPTER XVI.

SATISFACTION.

THE Bois de Boulogne is a lovely spot, and for years has been noted not only for its beautiful scenery and its splendid drives, but also for being the chosen meeting-place of gentlemen who come together to settle disputes according to the "code of honor."

There were so many charming little glades where a party upon a duello bent could adjust their differences without being disturbed, that few such affairs were ever settled elsewhere.

The three days which intervened between the challenge sent by the Russian prince to the young Virginian, Dunbar, and the evening fixed for the meeting, passed rapidly away.

Dunbar had made very little preparation for the encounter; he did not take the trouble to make a will, for, as he said, the law would divide his property fairly among his relatives if he fell in the fight. About the only important thing he did was to write a long letter to the Countess de Morel, and this letter, after sealing it carefully, he intrusted to Gordon.

"If the fellow puts me in a condition for planting, see that this reaches the countess's hands; that is the only favor, my dear Gordon, I require," he said.

But as for the prince, on the contrary, he patronized a shooting gallery, and practiced night and day with the weapons that had been selected for the fight, contrary to the rules of the code, which expressly prohibits such a thing.

Although a capital shot with the regular dueling-pistols, the hair-triggers bothered the Muscovite, who was rather inclined to dwell on his aim, and he was afraid that, not being used to the hair-trigger, the pistol would be discharged before his aim was certain.

The surgeon whom the Americans had selected was an old college chum, but now practicing in Paris—Hector Morillian he was called, and a better fellow never broke bread.

The coach which was to convey the party to the ground—a glade which had served as the scene of almost countless encounters—was ordered at eight so as to drop them on the spot promptly to the minute. And a stranger witnessing the three young men on their way, chatting with such glee, would never have suspected that on the bottom of the flacre were two strong boxes—one containing as fine a pair of dueling-pistols as could be found in France, the other a complete set of surgical instruments.

The Russian and his party were equally prompt, and both antagonists came upon the ground at the same moment.

The principals, exchanging a polite bow, retreated to opposite ends of the glade, leaving the seconds to arrange preliminaries, and while they were fixing matters the two surgeons held a brief conversation.

"Did you bring a case of instruments with you?" the prince's man asked. He was a thick-lipped, beetle-browed fellow, with an unmistakable hangdog look.

"Yes, of course; that is a strange question for a professional man like yourself to ask."

"Well, I didn't know, but I thought if you had not I would offer you the loan of mine, which are in the carriage out yonder; you will be certain to need them. This prince is a devil of a fellow; he always marks his man. I shall not need the knives, but they are at your disposal. Shall I go for them?"

A little glint of fire came into Morillian's eyes at this remark.

"If bragging was the game I don't doubt that your devil of a prince would prove the best man, but, since it is powder and ball that must settle this difference, permit me to doubt your prince's skill until I witness it," and then, in utter contempt, Morillian turned his back upon the other.

The arrangements were completed, the pistols loaded and the ground paced off. Thirty paces apart the combatants were to stand. Three was to be counted and then either was at liberty to fire.

The principals were dressed exactly alike in complete black so as to afford as poor a mark as possible.

After everything was settled, and the men placed in position, the captain held a brief conference with his principal, and this finished, he advanced to Gordon.

"Prince Peteroski having achieved all the reputation as a duelist that a man can well desire, has no wish to shed the blood of your principal, for such a victory he feels would not be a feather in his cap, and so, if Mr. Dunbar is willing to make a full and complete apology for the affront he put upon the prince, he, generously, will accept the amends," the captain said, in his loftiest manner.

"Well, I'll be hanged!" cried Gordon, in a rage; "what on earth do you take us for, you and your pinchbeck prince? Apology be cursed! My principal will see you in the furthest and hottest corner of the bottomless pit first!"

The demand had reached Dunbar's ears, as it was intended that it should, for it was a cunning trick on the part of the Frenchman to excite the American to anger and so unsteady his aim.

Dunbar understood this well enough, and he laughed at such child's play.

"Come, we are wasting time!" he exclaimed.

"I am here to kill not to talk!"

There was a fiery energy in the tone that for the moment startled the Russian, who now realized that he had not been wise in forcing this plucky American into a duel.

Gordon had won the toss, so it fell to him to give the signals.

"Are you ready?" he called out.

The click of the hammers answered.

"One! two! three!"

Hardly had the word escaped the young man's lips when up flew Dunbar's pistol, and apparently without aim he fired.

The Russian staggered and placed his left hand upon his breast, he was hit, but notwithstanding the wound, he endeavored to take deadly aim at his antagonist, but the ball went high over the American's head. The pistol dropped from the prince's hand, and with a groan he sunk to the ground. His second and the doctor instantly ran to his aid, while Gordon and Morillian hurried toward Dunbar.

"Are you hurt, old fellow?" Gordon cried.

"Not a scratch!"

"You have done for the prince, though," Morillian remarked.

"Indeed, I hope not!" Dunbar exclaimed. "I did not intend to kill the fellow, although I did try my best to wing him, for I thought he needed a lesson."

"Well, he's got it, and I'm afraid it is a center plug."

"Pray see how he is," said the American, with genuine concern.

Morillian advanced to where the two were bending over the prostrate man, who had apparently fainted. The doctor had his hand on the fallen man's pulse.

"How is he? Is he badly hurt?" the American surgeon inquired.

"I am afraid he is done for as far as this world is concerned," the other replied. "The bullet has gone straight through the lungs I think, and I believe he is bleeding internally."

"We had better all get out of the way for a time, for this affair will kick up a tremendous row, and the chances are that the gendarmes will be sharp after us," said the captain. "I'll see you in Rome in a week if you wend your steps that way. Give yourself no uneasiness about the prince; we will attend to him; but get out of the way as soon as possible."

The counsel was good, and with a parting bow the three Americans hurried from the field.

CHAPTER XVII.

DUNBAR IS ASTONISHED.

In the coach, rolling rapidly toward Paris, the three friends discussed the particulars of the encounter and speculated in regard to future movements.

"By Jove! old fellow, you settled him without any difficulty," Gordon remarked. "Do you know that this will be quite a feather in your cap, for the prince was one of the 'bad man' class, owned a private grave-yard and all that sort of thing—the bully of Europe, if one-half the stories are true that his satellites tell of his deeds."

"I'm sorry that I didn't examine the man," the young surgeon observed.

"Why so?"

"Because I don't believe he is so badly hurt. I have my suspicions of that doctor; he may be

all right; but there was something about him that impressed me unfavorably."

"He did look like a scamp of the first water, but then, that, probably, is natural to the profession," and Gordon winked at the surgeon as he delivered this shot.

"Well, I confess I am rather astonished, myself, at the result," Dunbar admitted. "I did not intend to kill the man, but, as I supposed from what I have heard of his skill as a marksman, that he was really a dead shot, my idea was to disable him before he could have time to take deliberate aim. From what I have seen of all these continental marksmen, I have come to the conclusion that they are all *slow* in firing—dwelling on the aim. My education was in a different school, and even at home where we have some pretty good snap-shots I was noted for my quickness; therefore my plan of action was to let him have it as soon as possible, and the moment I 'sighted' him I fired. I don't understand how I came to shoot through the lungs though for I designed to plug him just under the shoulder. A wound there is always ugly and troublesome but seldom dangerous."

"You 'downed' him anyway, and I suppose that you will have to make yourself scarce for a while, for if the man dies the authorities will be compelled to act. Isn't that about right, Morillian?" Gordon asked.

"Oh, yes; when the news of the duel and of the death of one of the combatants reaches the ears of the police, they will pretend to be moving heaven and earth to catch you, knowing all the while, too, that you have a day's start, and are, in all probability, safe out of the country. For just about three days they will hunt high and low for you and then—forget it. In three months you can return; you can shake hands with the chief of police; he will inquire, politely, about your health and express his wonder that you could remain away from Paris so long; that will be all."

"That is the duel in high life, but if two stone-cutters, or any other common mechanics, have a falling out and resort to knives to settle the difficulty, if one should happen to fall in the fight, then it is murder and the survivor stands a fine chance of going to the galleys for the rest of his life," Dunbar observed.

Morillian laughed.

"Peste! my dear fellow; what would you have? The same law for the gentleman and the *sans-culottes*? Ah *mon Dieu*! you want to overturn the Government!"

"But now, what is the programme? Home at once, eh?" Gordon questioned.

"No; we will try the German Spas for a few months until this blows over. I have a little business to settle here in France before I bid it good-by, and I can't bring myself to believe that the Russian is fatally hurt, for I am sure that I 'lined' him correctly for the shoulder; the rather hazy light might have had the effect of either elevating or depressing the ball an inch or so, but it seems to me clearly impossible that my aim was so untrue as to send the ball through the lungs."

When the carriage came to the Hotel du Nord, Morillian begged to be excused, as he saw a gentleman lounging in front of the building to whom he desired to speak.

The Americans thanked him heartily for his kindness, and he got out. Then they drove direct to their lodgings.

"A lady wants to see Monsieur Dunbar," the concierge reported—"a lady closely veiled, who says she wishes to communicate with Monsieur Dunbar upon important business."

The two friends looked at each other, for neither one was in the habit of receiving lady visitors.

"You had better go up, old fellow, and see what it is all about," Gordon remarked, "and I will amuse myself with a cigar here. It is probably a lady in distress who comes to ask a temporary loan, knowing the big-heartedness of monsieur, the American."

Gordon knew the tricks of the Parisian scamps well. To them an American signified a gold mine.

Dunbar proceeded up-stairs; a lady, plainly dressed and closely veiled, sat in the anteroom, and her figure seemed familiar to him.

"I am Monsieur Dunbar," he said, approaching her; "what do you require?"

The lady raised her veil, and judge of the young man's astonishment when he discovered that it was the Countess of Morel!

She was deeply excited, and her voice was tremulous with agitation as she spoke.

"Monsieur Dunbar, I trust as a gentleman that you will never breathe a word to mortal soul regarding this visit, for I know that it is rash and imprudent, but the motive which brings me must be my excuse to you, and no one else must know of it. This duel must not take place!"

The American was astonished, for he couldn't conceive how the news had come to the countess's ears, but a few words will explain the mystery.

Nichette, the crafty and unscrupulous waiting-maid, from an upper window had witnessed the scene in the garden, and overheard all that had been spoken. Knowing that a duel would

ensue she had cajoled the prince's valet into telling her the particulars, which he did faithfully with the exception that he made a mistake in regard to the date, setting the duel *four* days from the time of the quarrel instead of three.

The girl, an empty-headed little fool for all her cunning, had been weak enough to fall in love with the handsome Russian who employed her as a spy, and with all a foolish woman's dread that the prince would be killed she determined at any cost to prevent the meeting, and so delivered a fine story to her mistress.

The American and the prince had quarreled, she said, because the American had declared that there was a secret engagement between the Russian and the countess; the prince had denied it, and no doubt the American would be killed, as the Russian was a dead shot; but if mademoiselle would cause, in some way, the intelligence to be conveyed to the American that she was not engaged to the prince, and that she would be greatly displeased if the duel came off, no doubt the meeting might be prevented.

And when this news reached the ears of the young girl she became as terribly afraid that one of the contending parties might fall in the fight as the intriguing waiting-maid herself; so after worrying over the matter until the night before the day on which she had been informed the meeting would take place, without being able to devise any method to stop it, at the last moment she determined to go in person, although the step was a terribly bold one.

"You are too late; it is all over!"

"And you are unhurt?" she cried, tears of joy welling into her eyes, and in her excitement not weighing her words.

A flood of joy filled the soul of Dunbar at these unguarded words.

"Oh, Marie, do you care whether I live or die?" he cried, advancing to her side, clasping one of her fair hands in his and encircling her waist with his arm.

"Do not ask me now; this is no time, nor place, for the Countess of Morel to answer such a question. I sink with shame to meet your eyes when I reflect how bold and unmaidenly I have acted," she said, trembling with agitation and adjusting her veil over her face. "Let me go; I am not fit to talk now. Farewell! and be as silent as the grave."

Then she glided from his arms and was gone. But she left joy behind her.

CHAPTER XVIII.

ON THE SCENT.

ARMED with the important intelligence which he had received from the Italian boy, Rinot, the lawyer hurried to the chief of police.

Monsieur Preval, who had done more thinking over this case than he had troubled his head with for ten years, received Rinot with open arms, for at the first sight of the lawyer's face he perceived that he had news to communicate.

"Aha, my dear Monsieur Rinot—my acute Monsieur Rinot, you have a clew at last! I can see it in your face! Don't say no, or I shall die of vexation. I have fairly lost twenty pounds within the last ten days worrying over this accursed case. I want no more Americans or I shall go wild. *Figaro* this morning said plumply that I was an ass—a long-eared, dull-pated ass, or else I would have had the wretches who committed this outrage laid by the heels long ago."

"*Figaro* will sing another tune to-morrow, my dear Preval!" Rinot cried, sharing in the excitement of the other; then into his ear he poured the story which had been told him by the Italian boy.

"Ah, *mon Dieu*! It is as plain as the nose on one's face!" the chief of police exclaimed. "The boy's story is partly truth and partly a lie. I had my attention drawn to this Italian quarters some time ago, and I have had my suspicion that possibly they might be concerned in this affair. Do you not see, my dear Monsieur Rinot, how the matter was? The American, and this friend, whom he picked up at the masquerade—a fellow-countryman no doubt, flushed with wine—when they were in the cabaret to which they have been traced, thought it would be a fine joke to drop out of the back window upon the shed and so escape paying for the wine which they had drunk. Some of the Italian prowlers were on the watch and marked the Americans for their prey, for both being much under the influence of liquor it was an easy job for the gang, when the strangers passed through the yards and the passageway into the narrow street, to either decoy or force them into the old house; and once they were within the walls of the building the rascals went on the principle that dead men tell no tales, so they murdered the pair in order to strip them at their leisure. No doubt we will find both of the bodies concealed somewhere in the old house. You see, the boy did not dare to tell all the story for fear of implicating his comrades; but now that we have got a clew, leave me to hunt the cut-throats down! After we get hold of the gang some one of them will be sure to turn State's evidence."

Rinot had his own views of the situation, but they were at variance with the improbable ideas of the chief. He would see the house, however, so a couple of coaches were summoned and with a squad of police spies in plain clothes Preval and the lawyer departed to search the designated place.

It was found exactly as the boy had described, but it was closed, and did not look as if it had harbored any one within its walls for a year at least.

With a pick-lock one of the spies speedily forced back the lock bolt and at the head of his cohort Preval entered.

Within were found traces that plainly told of recent human occupancy.

The police agents were provided with all the necessary tools, dark lanterns, etc., so as to make a thorough search, but not until the party reached the cellar was anything of importance discovered, and there one of the keenest of the spies announced that in one corner the earth looked as if it had been recently disturbed.

"My very thought!" the chief of police exclaimed. "I suspected all along that the bodies of the murdered men would be found buried in some cellar. Dig, my men, dig speedily, I beg of you!"

The command was obeyed, and after about a foot of loose earth was removed a wooden box, coffin-like in shape and composed of rough boards, was exposed to view.

"Aha! In this box, no doubt, we will find the bodies!" the chief exclaimed.

The box was speedily unearthed and the cover of it carefully forced.

All gathered near.

There was a corpse in the box, but only one—that of a large and portly man. The face was partly disfigured, either by the gnawing of rats or through the blows by which the man had come to his end; the hair, mustache and goatee had been trimmed as though at first the murderers had designed to change the looks of the dead so that it would be difficult to identify the person, but the peculiar shape of the face, the suit of clothes, still on the corpse, and a couple of peculiar rings on the fingers were plain proofs to all that they looked upon the remains of the unfortunate American general.

"You see, my theory was exactly correct," the chief whispered in the lawyer's ear, highly delighted that his sagacity had foretold the truth. "And now we must lay these devils of Italians by the heels as soon as possible, for if the wind of this discovery gets out they will give leg-bail and we will have a de'il of a chase after them, while by throwing our net now we will surely be able to take them all at one grand cast."

So, calling his best man to him, the chief gave orders to take a large force, surround the Italian colony and arrest every soul in it—men, women and children.

"Don't let even a babe in arms escape you!" was Preval's parting injunction.

The chief was disappointed in one thing:—the closest search did not produce a second body.

"I can't understand it," he confided to Rinot. "If both the men were murdered here, both of the bodies ought to be here, eh?"

"Very true; but suppose, your excellency, that the second man was not a companion but a decoy, whose duty it was to lure the American from the masquerade ball to some spot where he could safely be disposed of?"

"Egad! I guess you are right in that surmise. It looks reasonable; and we may be able to pick the fellow out when we get hold of the Italians."

The party returned to head-quarters, where, in a fever of impatience, the chief waited for the return of the party sent to capture the supposed murderers.

"This case will be the crowning triumph of my career, Rinot!" Preval repeated again and again, as he paced restlessly up and down the office. "We will see who is the ass, when the details of this affair see the light."

The vainglorious meditations of the chief were cut short at last by the appearance of the officer detailed to the arrest.

"Aha, De Lancy, my dear fellow, how many birds, eh?" Monsieur Preval cried.

"Not one!"

"Not one!" howled the chief.

"No, your excellency; the Italian quarter that used to be near the Quay of Austerlitz is entirely deserted, and the neighbors say that they all left, by night, about ten days ago, without warning or saying where they were going."

"You see, after the murder, alarmed by our endeavors to solve the mystery, they fled, but we will track them. You have the boy safe, Rinot; he will be able to give us a clew, no doubt."

"Yes, I left him in my office, and if he is gone his address will be there."

But such was not the case; the boy had vanished as completely as the rest, and the closest search could not discover his whereabouts. From beginning to end it was a mysterious affair.

CHAPTER XIX.

A TRAGEDY.

In accordance with the plan agreed upon between the lawyer and the Detective Queen, Chopine betook himself to the countess's hotel and informed the young lady that he had taken the liberty to order a locksmith to call to put some strong fastenings on the casement in her room so that she could feel secure in the future from any unwarrantable intrusion.

This thoughtfulness pleased the countess greatly, and in the first flush of her gratitude she made the old lawyer acquainted with a fact which hitherto she had kept locked in her own bosom.

"I am very much obliged indeed, for your kindness, and I suppose you will consider me a silly girl when I say to you that I do not believe all the bolts and bars in the world will keep out the intruder who gave me such a fright the other night."

The old advocate stared; not understanding the girl's meaning.

"Well, my dear Marie," he remarked slowly, "it may be possible that it is the master-thief of the German legends who tormented you, but you must excuse me for thinking that our French bolts and bars will not prevail against him."

"It is no master-thief."

"What is it then?"

"It is a wild, perhaps a visionary idea that has taken possession of me."

"Let me hear what it is; then I can decide."

"It came to me on the night of the mysterious occurrence."

"Yes; go on."

"You know I do not remember the late Count of Morel, being only a child of tender years when he left France, but his full-length portrait hangs in the gallery, and I have so familiarized myself with it that if my uncle were to step before me living to-day, I am sure I should recognize him upon the instant."

"Very likely; the picture is an excellent one—the likeness being very striking."

"When I awoke the other night from that horrible sort of a nightmare, feeling conscious that some one was in my apartment, all that I could distinguish in the darkness was a shadowy form standing in the center of the room; I could hardly distinguish the outlines plain enough to say positively whether it was a man or woman, yet there was something about the figure that in some mysterious way recalled my uncle instantly to my mind."

Chopine began now to have an idea of the nature of the impression which evidently possessed the girl's mind, but instead of laughing at it, he attempted to reason soberly about the incident.

"It could not have been the count, child, of course, for he died years ago, and his bones now rest in the flowery jungles of Florida. Besides, he would not be apt, if he was in the flesh, to return to Paris and enter his hotel at midnight by a third-story window. I doubt if in his wild young days the count would have thought of such a thing, and he most certainly would not in his old age."

"Ah, but you do not understand me, my dear Monsieur Chopine; I do not think it was my uncle in the flesh I saw—"

"What then? His unquiet spirit?"

"Such things have been, you know," replied the girl, with perfect seriousness. "You must not doubt the power of the great and good Father above to produce such a miracle if in His infinite wisdom He so chooses."

Chopine shook his massive old head after the fashion of a great bull tormented by puny flies. This sort of argument was the hardest in the world to answer.

"My dear child, I do not doubt His power, but I do doubt whether he would exercise it in such a case. Of course you have not been many years out of your convent, and in such an institution miracles in connection with religion are believed in, as is only right, but in this wicked modern time of ours miracles are not performed. I have lived in the world a great many years, have led a pretty busy life, and have never seen one yet, although I have seen plenty of humbugs exposed that pretended to be of a miraculous origin. I am a plain, practical man, my dear Marie, and I cannot in my sober senses believe that my old friend, the Count of Morel, if he was allowed to revisit this world, would so far forget the dignity of his race as to—even in a spirit form—climb up a tree, barefooted, and enter his ancestral mansion, at the dead of night, through a third-story window. It is impossible, my child; I cannot accept the fact. A man—a mere mortal—might do such a thing, but a shadowy, ghostly form, of thin air, able to pass at will through the most substantial of walls, absolutely independent of railways and all our modern inventions! No, my dear countess, you can believe me, a real, genuine ghost would never have so disgraced his airy brotherhood."

But the young girl still clung to her idea. She could not answer the lawyer's reasoning, and so quietly put it to one side.

"I know I am perhaps foolish to allow such an idea to take possession of me, but I cannot

help it. When I saw the shadowy form, motionless in the dim light, I felt at once that it was my uncle's spirit come back to earth to reproach me, perhaps, because I had not at once yielded up to his orphaned daughter the rights which to her belong."

Chopine made a gesture of despair.

"My dear child, you must not go on thinking in this strain. I am not the kind of man to give you religious advice; that is out of my line entirely; but now I say to you, go to your father-confessor, tell him the whole story, and if he does not say that in this suit you have acted exactly as a good daughter of the church and an honest woman should act, why then I know nothing of the meaning of the word honesty, and the quicker I turn monk and get out of the world the better. You speak of your cousin—where is she? Has she appeared to claim her rights? Is she alive? Can any one say for certain?"

"But if she does come?"

"You will not find me the one to counsel you to wrong her by even so much as a franc's worth," replied the old man, solemnly.

"Ah, you are a second father to me, Monsieur Chopine! You are ever good, kind and just!" cried the girl, in tremulous accents, her eyes filling with tears.

There was a suspicious moisture, too, about the orbs of the old gentleman, but the entrance of the servant with the announcement that the locksmith was below was a timely diversion.

Chopine conducted the man to the sleeping chamber of the countess, and after he got him up there made a careful inspection of him.

The instrument was well chosen, for a more dull, stolid, stupid-looking young man Chopine, after his examination, decided he had never set eyes upon.

"The business has been explained to you?" the lawyer said.

"Yaw, mynheer!"

The workman was a Dutchman!

"You can lock the doors while you work so that none of the servants can disturb you."

"Yaw, mynheer," again said the mechanical-like man.

Chopine returned to the drawing-room, where by this time Madame de Moissac had joined the countess.

Fifteen or twenty minutes were spent in casual conversation: then the lawyer rose to depart; he understood that the locksmith spy would make his report to La Marmoset and not to him.

The ladies accompanied him out into the hall and as they stood there chatting, the report of a pistol echoed on the air.

The sound apparently came from the apartment above where the locksmith was employed.

"Great heavens! monsieur; what does that mean?" cried Madame de Moissac.

"Some accident, I fear; the fellow may have shot himself!" Then the lawyer cried out for Jules, the major-domo, to summon the servant to accompany him up-stairs. The true suspicion, though, of the lawyer, and one that he did not give utterance to, for fear of alarming the ladies, was that the locksmith had discovered the lurking-place of the intruder in the chamber and that there had been a struggle.

Reinforced by Jules and the servants, the ladies bringing up the rear, Chopine hurried up-stairs. The door of the room was locked, and when the lawyer knocked no answer came from within.

Anticipating that something unusual had happened, Chopine called for a crow-bar and when it was brought from the stable he forced open the door.

An awful sight met their gaze. In the center of the room, stretched upon his back, weltering in his blood was the disguised spy.

"Oh, mon Dieu! He is dead! This has become a house of horrors!" the countess cried.

Chopine knelt by the side of the stricken man and tore open his blouse; the blood was oozing from an ugly-looking wound in his breast.

"He is not dead! Quick, a doctor!"

And while the doctor was coming Chopine examined both the room and the person of the man carefully. Not the slightest trace of a weapon could he find, and yet the man had been shot, and when the doctor arrived and examined the wound he declared in the most positive manner that it could not have been inflicted by the man himself.

But whether suicide or murder the chances were that he would never speak again.

Then who would explain the mystery?

CHAPTER XX.

THE BIG DRUM OF THE CAFÉ AMERIQUE.

PARIS is emphatically the city of restaurants and drink-shops; in no other metropolis do the inhabitants pass so much of their time from home, in the open air and in the places of public resort.

Especially in the neighborhood of the breathing-places of the gay and fickle Parisians do the drinking shops abound. All the larger establishments have music of some kind, ranging

from the full orchestra to the wheezy hand-organ, according to the style of the establishment.

One of the smallest of these resorts rejoiced in the high-sounding name of "Café Amerique," although there was more wine sold upon the premises than coffee and more beer than all other fluids combined.

The place had a good name, though, for everything was excellent in quality and was served very cheaply.

Master Camard, the host, was a genius in his way.

They say that "good wine needs no bush," but he reasoned that you must first get the fickle public within doors to sample the "goods" offered, before they can find out that the wine is good, and if there is no bush at the door—the ancient sign signifying that wine is sold within—the multitude is likely to pass on its way.

So, when the host hoisted the big golden eagle, bearing the words, "Café Amerique" in its claws, and threw open the doors of his establishment, he put an attraction within which for a time proved to be popular.

The music provided consisted of a band of five brass pieces, rather indifferent players, but what they lacked in harmony they more than made up in noise, and in some nook and corner of great, bewildering Paris, that receptacle of the curiosities from all the world, the host had found a real live American Indian, and this noble chief—who, to the disgrace of his race, was seldom sober—was placed in the "garden" with the band, his duties being to beat the big drum, which office he faithfully attended to, when not occupied in drinking beer at the expense of some curious soul who was willing to pay for the pleasure of seeing the foaming liquid glide down the capacious throat of the noble red-man.

The more beer he drank and the less he played, the better the rest of the band were pleased, for the red-man had no ear for music, and the drum beat out of all time, making horrible discord.

But the savage was a drawing card and took immensely, until he ceased to be a novelty, and then the public took to running after some new idol.

But the savage was a paying investment, even after his novelty had worn off, for he got no wages to speak of, and he was good for five or ten francs' profit daily on the beer which his admirers bought for his consumption.

Evening had set in, and the band had just commenced to play, although the patrons of the gardens were not yet on the promenades, and the cafés were nearly deserted—a few customers getting supper being the only occupants, when a tall girl with a handsome face and a superb form, neatly dressed, entered the garden, and, seating herself at one of the tables well back in the grounds, called for a pot of coffee and some sweet-cakes.

Struck with the appearance of this customer, Camard took the trouble to wait upon her in person. She was not one of his regular customers, and, as far as he could remember, he had never seen her in the place before.

At the first glance he had set her down for a grisette, or a shop-girl, but upon a careful observation he changed his opinion, for there was a certain something about her—a proud carriage to the head, an independent movement to the form, which seemed to say that the beauty was her own mistress and brooked commands from no one.

An actress at one of the minor theaters! Yes, that was the solution of the riddle, and the host, who prided himself upon his theatrical taste, mentally prophesied that the girl had a fortune in her face and figure.

When Camard brought the light repast, she paid for it from a pocket-book which was well stuffed with coins.

As the girl replaced her pocket-book, her glance happened to fall upon the savage.

"Eh! what is that you have got there, my master?" she asked, apparently looking upon a savage for the first time.

"That is the Big Drum of the Café Amerique," the landlord replied, with natural pride.

"It is alive—a real person?"

"Of course it is alive, and when the spirit moves him he can play the drum like an angel."

"What is it?"

"A real savage from the wilds of America; it is the only one in Paris, or in France either, for that matter; it cost much money to get him here, and we do not make any charge to look at him, though, if you feel inclined to be generous, my dear ma'm'selle, he will be happy to drink a glass of wine or beer with you."

"It drinks, then, and eats, too?"

"Yes, but not much; ever since he has been with me he has lived principally upon liquid food. You see, ma'm'selle, I suppose we do not serve up the right kind of food to suit his taste," and then he lowered his voice mysteriously. "If we could tempt him with a nice, fat roast baby now—"

Mademoiselle gave a little scream.

"And you ask me to drink with him, a horrid wretch that eats babies!"

"Oh, but not here, mam'selle; you need not be alarmed; we wouldn't allow such a thing in France of course; he is quite civilized now."

"Can he talk?"

"Oh yes! speaks our language very well indeed, that is, you know, when I say that, one must make some allowance for such a barbarian. Talk with him, mam'selle—try a couple of glasses of wine upon him; I am sure he will much amuse you," and with this sly bid for trade the host returned to his counter.

The girl watched the savage attentively for a moment, a strange expression upon her features which were as resolute as they were beautiful. Then she called one of the waiters.

"Garçon, bring me a bottle of wine and a couple of glasses, and then ask monsieur the savage yonder, the Big Drum, if he will do me the favor to join me."

The waiter, a smart lad, leaned upon the table in a confidential way.

"Does ma'm'selle wish monsieur savage to talk, eh?"

"Yes, why else do I pay for his wine?"

"Try brandy, then," and he winked, knowingly. "One sup of brandy is worth a whole bottle of wine to unloosen his tongue. It is a shame if ma'm'selle wished to hear him talk—and he is comical enough when he gets a-going—that she should spend her money for nothing. Brandy warms him, and he talks; wine he drinks like a fish, but it makes him sad and as dumb as an oyster."

"You are a brave lad!" and opening her purse she slipped a franc piece into his hand; thereby for a moment transfixing the waiter with astonishment, for two sous was about the extent of the tips he generally received.

"Now a bottle of your best brandy."

"Our best is five francs, and a small bottle two, ma'm'selle," stammered the lad, reluctant to "stick" the customer who had feed him so liberally.

"That will do; bring it and then call the savage."

The waiter fairly flew to obey the order, thinking that he had got hold of a princess in disguise.

The brandy was brought and the savage invited. With stately steps he abandoned the big drum and advanced to the table, his watery, faded eyes listening as he beheld the liquid refreshment which had been provided.

The Indian was about the medium size, and apparently a very old man, for his copper-colored face was deeply lined—that is as much of it as could be discerned free from the war-paint which the chief wore lavishly, as if he was ready to take the trail against a foe.

His head was cleanly shaven with the exception of the scalp-lock upon the crown, in which half a dozen colored feathers were braided. The color of the hair, too, which had changed from a raven black to a dingy gray, seemed to indicate that the warrior was an aged man.

He was dressed in a buckskin hunting-shirt and leggings, but the garments were so stained with age and wear, so disfigured by patches and darns, it was hard to tell what the original color of the suit had been.

He seated himself at the table opposite the girl; she filled a glass clear to the very brim with brandy, and pushed it over to him. He swallowed it at a draught and then held out the glass for more.

She replenished it immediately, and the second dose of potent liquor soon followed the first down the thirsty gullet.

"It is heap good!" he muttered, as he pushed the glass across the table.

"Very good," she observed, as she slowly poured out the liquor. "What tribe is my brother?"

"Seminole," replied the chief, like a parrot in repeating a lesson.

"A Seminole? That is good. I am an American myself—from Florida."

"The white girl lies," said the Indian, placidly, and never taking his eyes off the brandy.

CHAPTER XXI.

A LITTLE OF THE PAST.

THE girl laughed; the bluntness of the Seminole seemed to amuse her.

"Oho, I lie, do I?" and she pushed another glassful of brandy over to the chief, which he swallowed instantly. "Well, Master Savage, whether it is true or not, one thing is certain—you are not very polite or else you would not tell a lady she lied, even if you believed she was not speaking the truth. But why do you doubt my word?"

"No fool chief—many moons live in Paris."

"And I suppose I am not the first who has claimed to be an American?"

"Chief know—no fool 'um," and the savage shook his head sagely, pushing his empty glass toward the young woman in a very suggestive manner.

"But I am not trying to deceive you," the girl replied, filling up the Indian's glass again. "I am, honestly and truly, an American, and meeting you here in this strange land, far from

home, my heart warms to you as a countryman, although your skin is red and mine is white. And then, truly, too, you are more than a countryman, for if you are of the Seminole tribe you are a neighbor, for I was born in Florida."

There was a slight sparkle of intelligence in the dull orbs of the Indian as, for a moment, he allowed his eyes to wander from the brandy in the glass to the countenance of the girl.

"Florida—land of flowers—much big," he ejaculated.

"Yes, but big as it is, I have trodden over nearly every foot of Southern Florida, from Tampa Bay and Eau Gallie to the Everglades. I have dwelt in the wigwams of the Seminoles, and learned to speak their tongue almost as well as my own," and then, as a climax to the declaration, she pushed the glass of brandy toward the savage; an instant only the fragrant liquor sparkled in the light, and then down the throat of the chief it went.

The liquor swallowed, he leaned his elbows upon the table, and, tapping one long and skinny fore finger upon the other, spoke:

"The white girl is a child of Florida—her skin is white, yet she has dwelt in the wigwams of the red braves, and she can speak their tongue?"

"True, every word!"

"The chief no understand how this thing can be."

"No more do I, and that is the reason why I have sought the aid of my red brother."

The red-skin shook his head as a sign that he did not comprehend.

"Has the chief ever been lost?"

The savage blinked; the question seemed foreign to the subject.

"Has the chief ever wandered in a trackless jungle, not knowing which way to turn to bring him to the huts of his people again, wearied with the chase, faint with hunger perhaps? If so, would he not have welcomed, as a good spirit, the sight of the human who could put him on the right track again?"

The chief nodded gravely and slid his glass across the table as a sign that more brandy would be acceptable.

"I am lost here in Paris, and I seek a guide."

Again the Indian shook his head; the riddle was too much for his dull wits.

"I know not who or what I am, and I seek a friendly hand to lead me to the truth; the secret which lies hid in Florida, here in Paris, must be told. If you are a Seminole chief you can tell me what I wish to know."

"Chaf-a-la-ya is a great brave of the Seminole tribe!" exclaimed the red-skin, sententiously, and he pointed at the empty glass significantly.

"Chaf-a-la-ya!" repeated the girl, as though striving to remember whether she had ever heard the name before, but apparently no chord of recollection was touched.

"Great warrior—many scalps in his wigwam," and out again came the talon-like hand for the glass of brandy which the girl had not neglected to replenish.

"How long has the chief been in this country?"

"Many moons—so long that the red-man cannot tell."

"Was my brother in Florida when the massacre of Tampa took place?"

The red-skin beat his brawny breast with his hand.

"Chaf-a-la-ya led the red warriors when they swept the pale-faces from the land which they had stolen."

A puzzled look came over the face of the girl and she surveyed the Indian in a manner which plainly showed she doubted his word.

"My brother led the Seminoles at the massacre of Tampa?"

"The chief has said."

"My red brother's memory has played him false for it was Tiger-tail who led the Seminoles."

The savage straightened himself up in a dignified manner.

"Tiger-tail is a boy! Chaf-a-la-ya is the big chief of the Seminoles!"

Although doubtful in regard to the savage's statement, yet the girl refrained from disputing as she had good reasons for so doing.

"The chief was at the massacre, then?"

"Chaf-a-la-ya walked in blood that day."

"Were there many prisoners taken on that occasion?"

"None—the red-men killed all—men, squaws and children."

"Oh, yes; but there was one prisoner taken."

"No!"

"Yes, there was, a child—a little girl who was carried to Tiger-tail's camp by the waters of Lake Okeechobee, and there remained until she was ransomed by a French trader from Eau Gallie. If you were in command of the war-party you ought to know something of this prisoner."

"A child—yes, there was a child," said the Indian, very slowly.

"And the French trader, do you remember him?"

"Oh, yes, Bienville."

"It was he who brought you to this country?"

"Yes—by a trick; he enticed me on board of his vessel, gave me rum. I slept and when I awoke the sea surrounded us."

"He brought you to France for the purpose of exhibiting you to the people at so much a head?"

"Yes—a great Seminole chief to be stared at like a wild beast," and the old man scowled in anger.

"Where is Bienville now?"

"Dead."

A look of surprise appeared on the face of the woman.

"He is dead?"

"Yes, the Great Spirit punished him for kidnapping the Seminole chief. On the sea a storm came up and the demon of the lightning struck the ship. The white men thought that she was sinking and they took to the boats, leaving the great chief on the deserted vessel to die, but the Great Spirit willed it otherwise, and the red-man standing on the deck of the wreck saw the boats of the false white men swallowed up by the angry waves; all perished but the Seminole chief who was rescued by a French ship."

"Ah, that explains the mysterious disappearance of Bienville; his absence was never understood, and for ten years I have waited for him to return," observed the girl, in a low tone, resting her chin upon her hand, the elbow of which was placed upon the table, and gazing abstractedly at the floor. The observation plainly was not intended to be overheard by the Indian but his eager ears drank in every word.

"Bienville dead who else can push my fortunes but myself?" she continued. Then she lifted up her head and looked at the savage. "You were the great chief of the Seminoles and you led the warriors at the massacre of Tampa?"

"Yes."

"And did you know the French planter, Morel, who was killed in the massacre and whose child you bore away with you as a captive?"

The Indian shook his head.

"But you remember the child—the little girl?"

The savage nodded.

"Would you know her now if you were to meet her?" queried the woman, anxiously, and she looked the Indian right in the eye as she put the question.

The chief stared vacantly at the pretty face of the girl and then shook his head:

"It is so many moons ago," he muttered.

"But her face could be brought back to your recollection. You have forgotten me, although I remember you very well. You are older and so am I, but in my case the change from a child to a woman has been so great that it is not strange you should not remember me." Then she poured the last of the brandy into the glass and bestowed it upon her guest. "This is no place to talk," she observed, as the Indian drained the glass to its very dregs. "To-night, when the café closes, I must have speech with you. Where can you be found?"

The Indian named his lodging-house, watching closely the face of the girl as he did so, but if he expected to see evidence of emotion there he was disappointed. She merely nodded, said she would call upon him, and then departed.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE PATIENT IS FRACTIOUS.

THANKS to the condition in which the fresh patient arrived the proprietor of the retreat had no difficulty in placing him in the apartment which had been prepared for his reception. He had the new-comer stripped and a night-shirt put upon him, and then he was snugly tucked up in bed.

Three attendants assisted the "doctor"—big, muscular fellows, almost as powerful as Peloton himself, but as they surveyed the stalwart proportions of the stranger they shook their heads, and one of them remarked to the master of the institution that he hoped to Heaven that the new monsieur was not inclined to be violent, for if he was it would be a terrible task to keep him in order. The "deaf and dumb" servants evidently had tongues and ears, and well knew how to use them!

Peloton affected to make light of this idea, but in reality he was seriously troubled, for he had a suspicion that the man was no more affected in his mind than he was himself, and that his incarceration was an ingenious trick on the part of the man who had placed him in confinement to get him out of the way, but that was nobody's business, according to Peloton's ideas; in anticipation of just such cases he had set up his institution. The people who paid for the keeping of such patients were not apt to haggle about the bills.

But before he retired that night he confided to his wife the suspicion that there would be a deuce of a time in the morning after the patient had recovered from the effects of the powerful

narcotic which had evidently been administered to him.

Peloton's assistants, too, had talked the matter over before retiring, and one and all prepared themselves for a tough time in the morning with the "mad John Bull" as they termed the stranger.

Morning came.

Within two hours after the gray light stole in through the strong iron bars of the grated window, the patient opened his eyes and looked around him. The effects of the powerful narcotic still lingered in his system, and for a few moments his mind did not work clearly—he gazed vacantly around, but, little by little, he realized that he was not in dream-land, and then suddenly he sat bolt upright in the bed.

"Well, curse me, if this don't beat cock-fighting all hollow!" he cried. Then he passed his right hand over the upper part of his forehead as if to push back stray locks of hair, but this was a useless proceeding for not a bit of hair was on the man's head. Apparently, though, he was either not aware of this fact, or had forgotten it, for a most complete expression of amazement took possession of his face as he slowly passed his hand all over his head, evidently in search of the missing scalp covering.

"May I be eternally jiggered if I ain't as bald as an eel!" he muttered. "But, where am I, and what does all this mean, anyway? Where are my clothes? Is this a prison? Am I myself or somebody else?"

Then he leaped out of bed and ran to the window. All he could see through it was the garden and the river in the distance.

He searched the room thoroughly.

Not the slightest trace could he find of his clothes, for the attendants had been careful to remove every garment.

There was no furniture in the room—nothing but the bed, which was a little iron one, like those generally in use in hospitals, and the patient sat down upon the edge of it and looked around him ruefully.

"I should believe that I am crazy, if I wasn't sure that I am not!" he exclaimed, "although what I have gone through since I struck this accursed country is enough to addle the brains of almost any man. But, what is this den, anyway? and what does it all mean? Is it a prison—a hospital, or what?"

Then, actuated by a sudden thought, he jumped up and ran to the door. As he had surmised—it was fastened upon the outside.

He tried his strength against it, but the house was an old chateau, built in the days when houses were put up to last, not constructed after the flimsy fashion common to modern times, and the man soon saw that were he possessed of twice the strength that dwelt within his frame he could not hope to make his way through the door.

"Well, well, I suppose some explanation of all this mystery will come in time," he murmured, as he turned away from the door and sat down again upon the edge of the bed.

And, as he sat there, he was a most peculiar sight: completely bald, a stubby beard disfiguring his chin, and attired in a long night-shirt which covered him from neck to heels; upon his face the expression of complete bewilderment which the novelty of his position produced.

"Somebody will come soon, I suppose, unless they intend to leave me to starve to death, and then I'll have an explanation or a fight," and he doubled up his brawny fist in a menacing way. "Great Caesar!" he suddenly cried, "the odds are ten to one, though, that I won't be able to understand a word of their cussed lingo. Blast these frog-eaters and their parley-vooing!"

Just as he finished the speech, there came a slight noise to his ears as if of some one at the door; his eager gaze was at once riveted upon it.

A little panel, in the upper part of the door, which had escaped his inspection, opened noiselessly, and the rather sinister face of Monsieur Peloton appeared in the aperture.

"Hang me if he don't look exactly like a cut-throat! It is the jailer, I suppose," the prisoner thought, "but, as the fellow in the play says—I must dissemble." And so he nodded familiarly to Peloton and smiled in the most friendly manner.

Peloton was a wary customer, but for all his cunning the smile of the stranger succeeded in deceiving him, and so he unlocked the door and entered the room. An attendant who was behind him, with some clothes hanging over his arm, remained in the doorway.

The patient arose, and despite his rather peculiar costume, received the master of the institution in a dignified way, with a ceremonious bow.

The French as a nation are nothing if not polite, and Peloton, delighted to find, as he supposed, that the new-comer was not inclined to be violent, responded to the salutation in the most cordial manner.

"Now let me see if I can make this infernal jackass understand me," the patient said to himself. "He doesn't look as if he could speak anything but their confounded French gibberish."

With a dignified wave of his hand he pointed to the window, so well secured by the strong iron bars.

"Speak English, eh? Is this a prison?"

Now the Frenchman did not understand English at all, but the word *prison* he did comprehend.

"Prison!" he exclaimed, with the emphatic shrug of the shoulders peculiar to his race. "Oh, *mon Dieu*, no! It is a retreat—my retreat—M. Peloton's retreat!"

He spoke in French of course, and the word retreat—*retraite* in French—the other could not interpret.

"What the devil does he mean?" the supposed John Bull muttered. "He says that it isn't a prison, but what the deuce does he say it is? A hospital, perhaps. Say, is this a hospital?"

Now this word being so entirely different from the French *hospice*, the master of the establishment shook his head; he did not comprehend; but, in order to forward matters a little, he signified for the attendant to come forward with the clothes.

Handing them to the patient, Peloton signified by signs that he was to put them on. There was a jacket and pantaloons of coarse stuff, very much the same in color as the garb worn by the galley-slaves at Toulon—a cunning device on the part of asylum-master to trace his birds in case any of them should escape. A man in such a costume could be easily traced. A pair of coarse stockings and common shoes completed the dress.

"That is a nice sort of a rig for a gentleman to put on!" ejaculated the patient, in utter disgust, as he took the clothes from the hands of the smiling Frenchman. "But I reckon almost anything is better than what I've got on. A man can't very well make a dash for liberty in a night-gown."

So he proceeded to array himself in the clothing; but, as he was a big man, and the jacket and pantaloons of medium size, the fit was anything but good.

"By Jingo! I feel as if I was in a strait-jacket!" he muttered, after he had finished buttoning the upper garment over his broad chest. "And now that I am in a presentable condition, the quicker I get out of this the better, for it is evident they want to keep me here, and, as we can't understand each other, an explanation is impossible."

Carelessly both Peloton and the attendant had moved to one side so that the way to the door was open, and, before either of the two comprehended his intention, the patient had gained the threshold, but escape was cut off by two stalwart attendants posted in the entry without.

"Oho, we are in for a fight!" the patient cried.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A DANGEROUS CUSTOMER.

PELTON and the attendant within the room had followed the patient upon the instant, but he, discovering that his escape was cut off, hurried to the window in the opposite direction, not hoping to escape through it—for this casement, like the one in the room, was guarded by heavy iron bars—but to prevent his foes from assailing him in the rear. His room was the last one in the entry, and the passage ended at this window. With his back against it, and his formidable fists doubled up menacingly, he awaited the onset.

Confident in their numbers, four against one, they approached, but when they came near the fractious patient all suddenly halted.

"He is a fighter," growled one of the men.

"All these John Bulls fight like demons with their fists," declared another.

And despite the brute force which dwelt within his own massive frame, Peloton was as averse as his men to test the prowess of the stranger, and so he tried diplomacy before resorting to actual war.

Speech being impossible, he had to resort to signs; so he held up one finger, then he counted himself and his satellites and displayed four fingers of the other hand, then nodded from the one finger to the four, and shook his head violently.

"One against four, eh? And you think that I haven't got any show," he muttered. "Well, that remains to be seen. I've licked four men in my time, single-handed, and though, maybe they wasn't quite so big as your crowd, yet they knew how to handle themselves, which no Frenchman I ever saw could do. So, come on, you accursed frog-eaters! In two jerks of a lamb's tail I will smash you up into corn-batter!"

If Peloton had been easily understood, the other's pantomime was equally easy to comprehend. Those terrible fists and flashing eyes meant business, certainly.

Peloton shrugged his shoulders.

"The madman will not listen to reason, and therefore we must beat him down; but, look out for his fists, and do not give him a chance to strike you. So, when I say the word, all close in on him together!"

"*Avance!*" yelled Peloton, and the four sprung forward—Peloton in advance.

Crash!

The iron-like fist struck squarely between the keeper's eyes, and felled him as if he had been shot. In his fall he knocked over the man behind him; but hardly was Peloton down, when out came the left fist and the man on that side, catching the blow right in the throat, was knocked over all in a quivering heap—terribly hurt.

The third man, rushing in, clutched the patient, but the stranger, with the greatest apparent ease, broke the Frenchman's gripe, secured an "under hold," and threw him, head down, on the top of Peloton and his assistant, who were just picking themselves up.

Then with a deer-like leap the patient bounded over them and fled down the near-by stairway.

Peloton and his men followed as soon as they could pick themselves up and on the ground floor were joined by the madame, armed with a most formidable club.

"Oh, you fools, dolts, idiots, to try to fight with an Englisher with your fists!" she yelled at the top of her lungs when she caught sight of their bruised and battered countenances. "Get sticks all of you or else he will escape!"

Out into the garden the whole party hurried, for the patient had dashed through the open door into the grounds without.

From the door of the mansion the main entrance into the garden could not be seen, as, after the old fashion, the drive-way wound around like a snake, and from the house that portion of it which led to the river appeared more like the main avenue to the gate, so the fugitive was deceived and ran toward the river instead of to the gate.

The mistake cost him some loss of time and so when he reached the street entrance the porter on guard there, alarmed by the noise, was ready to receive him.

This porter, an old soldier, understood the necessity of prompt action; therefore, when the fugitive came bounding along, with a billet of wood in his hand, which he had caught up as he ran, the guard promptly leveled his short carbine and put a ball into the flying man, who took but a dozen steps more, then pitched forward upon the earth.

"Oh, *mon Dieu*, Jacques! Why did you fire?" cried Peloton, in despair. "Why did you kill him?"

"Ah, colonel, there is no danger of that," replied the porter, saluting; "I merely winged him so as to stop his flight. The hurt is not at all dangerous."

And so it proved; the bullet had passed through the fleshy part of the leg, inflicting a painful wound but not one affecting or endangering life.

So Peloton was consoled; no probability now that the patient would attempt to escape for some time.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE LAST OF THE AMERICAN.

THE discovery of the remains of the murdered American—for that he had been murdered there was not, apparently, the shadow of a doubt—was a great plume in the cap of Monsieur Antoine Preval, the Minister of Police.

The newspapers rung with his praises. Public opinion, always as fickle as the wind, veered about. A week before the discovery the police were a set of blind dolts and their chief no better, but now that the mystery had been ferreted out, no city in Europe could boast of a finer force of acute-nosed detectives! Of course not!

One thing only troubled the police and the public; the Italians, who had evidently committed the deed, had succeeded in escaping without leaving a single clew to their whereabouts; the route even by which they had left Paris was unknown, and the keenest search by the police failed to gather anything satisfactory in regard to it.

This was really not to be wondered at, for, according to the best information obtainable, the criminals had a week's start, and in seven days a man who has such reason for haste as an accusation of murder pursuing him, can get over a good deal of ground.

But that the Italian boy should be able to evade the argus-eyed officials was wonderful. He at least had not had seven days' start—hardly seven hours; but, although Monsieur Preval "moved heaven and earth," not the slightest intelligence in regard to him could be procured. Indeed, Rinot was the only person in all Paris who, apparently, had ever seen the lad. But that he was in France, probably in Paris, the police felt sure.

The telegraph had been promptly put in motion; the whole line of the frontier was alarmed, the police at the sea-ports were notified, so that it was clearly impossible, Monsieur Preval declared, that he could escape, unless he was capable of assuming some impenetrable disguise, which could not be done by such a boy.

The American had been decoyed away by a woman dressed up as a man; clearly one of the Italian women masquerading, and had been murdered in some obscure retreat, the old house in which the remains were found, proba-

bly, for the sake of the money which the assassins supposed he carried on his person.

As Americans, as a rule, spend their cash abroad so freely, that all are supposed to be as rich as bonanza kings, this was how the American had come to his untimely end.

The body exhumed by the police was fully identified by Rinot, who, having enjoyed more confidential relations with the American than any one else in Paris, was of course a competent witness; but the officials of the hotel where the general had resided testified also in regard to the identity of the body.

So, after the forms of the law were complied with, the remains of the ill-fated man were re-committed to the earth, a handsome subscription having been taken up among the members of the American colony residing in the gay French capital for the purpose of providing their countryman with a suitable burial.

The affair was over; the general was decently interred, then, in the seclusion of his private office, Rinot talked the whole matter over with his confidential clerk, Robert Camion, in whose judgment he greatly confided.

"Preval is an ass!" the lawyer declared, "and he is never so happy and confident as when he is on a false scent. The Italians may have attacked and murdered the American for the purpose of plundering him; but why should they trouble themselves to bury the body when they might have flung it into the river and so destroyed all trace of the deed? Then, too, what motive had this Italian boy to give information about the matter, knowing, as he did, that he himself might be suspected of having a hand in the deed?"

"I do not believe that the Italians had aught to do with the matter. The trap into which the American fell was too complete, and the risk of detection too great for such miserable wretches," Camion confidently declared.

"Who then did the deed?" asked the lawyer, looking sharply at the clerk.

"Who has the strongest motive for wishing the American dead—who profits most by such a thing?"

There was a deep silence in the room for a moment and then Rinot lifted up his head which in his abstracted thought he had allowed to fall upon his breast and said:

"The Countess Morel!"

"Right, sir! That is my thought, exactly! There is no one else in the world as far as we know who had a powerful incentive to the crime."

"Just so, Camion! If the American's mission had been successful—and the probabilities were strong that it would be—at one blow he would have stripped the countess of all she possessed, although such was not his intention if he had his way in the matter, for he confided to me that he intended to let the countess still retain the estates in France, as, he justly observed, the American property was large enough to satisfy any one."

"These high-bred women sometimes are driven to desperate acts," remarked Camion, who, having been bred in the gutter, had all the instinctive hatred of the *sans-culottes* for the upper class—the "aristocrats."

"It does not seem probable—"

"Yet it is possible!" Camion hastened to add.

"Yes; but then the heir is not yet discovered and she may not be!"

"Oh, she will be found, sir!" confidently. "The heirs to these large estates never die, or if they do they leave children behind them to make good the claim. It is only the children of the poor—the nobodies who die off like rotten sheep."

"But her lawyer, Chopine, is not a man to advise or permit such a desperate course to be adopted."

"These high-bred dames are as cunning as serpents sometimes. I agree with you that Monsieur Chopine would not permit such a thing if he knew aught of it, but it could be done without his knowledge; tools are plenty in this world for those who have the means to pay for them. This stranger rose in the path of madame, the countess, as a demon, who came to wrest from her the fortune which she had so long enjoyed—to reduce her to the poverty which to one of her haughty mind would be worse than death. She saw only one way to avert the evil fortune hanging over her and in her mad desperation she plotted the American's death. Ah, monsieur, listen to my words; the clew to the assassins of the American is to be found in the Hotel Morel and nowhere else."

Rinot was not convinced, but admitted that there might be something in the idea.

"Have I your permission to probe the matter to the quick?" demanded the clerk.

"Yes, yes; but proceed very cautiously."

"Oh, have no fear in regard to that; no one shall suspect my game until the time comes to strike the blow!"

Another web weaving—another foe for the Countess of Morel.

CHAPTER XXV.

IN SUSPENSE.

As we have stated, examination revealed that the locksmith was not dead, as all had at first

supposed; he still breathed. Chopine had ordered the apartment cleared, permitting no one to remain but the countess, madame, and the doctor, and then proceeded to investigate the whole matter.

Inspection showed that the pistol had been held so near the head that the powder of the discharge had blackened the locksmith's face.

"Suicide, I think, after all," remarked the doctor.

"Oh, impossible!" demurred the lawyer; "the man would never select such a place as this."

"You can see for yourself that the weapon was held very close to his head; see, the grains of powder are imbedded in his face!"

"But the weapon itself—it is not here!"

"It may have been removed by one of the servants," the doctor suggested.

"No, monsieur," declared the countess, "myself and madame were the first to enter the room, and nothing has been disturbed."

"Mademoiselle, if you will have the kindness to order me a basin of water and towels I will examine the hurt, while you, monsieur, can investigate the apartment yonder, where it is possible some clew may be discovered," and the doctor pointed to the passage leading into the ante-room.

The countess did not summon the servants but brought the articles required, herself, and while the doctor proceeded to wash away the blood which had clotted on the temple she accompanied the old advocate. The old lady assisted the doctor.

The anticipations of the medical gentleman were not realized, however, for nothing could be found within the other room having the slightest bearing upon the tragedy. The door, too, leading into the hall, the only means of egress from the hall, was tightly locked upon the inside.

"Oh, I had neglected to mention, Monsieur Chopine, the other door was also locked when the alarm was given, and we were obliged to force it open before we could gain an entrance," the countess observed.

"Upon my word the affair grows more and more mysterious," the old man declared, not ashamed to confess that he was completely puzzled. "Both the doors locked and the man alone in the room, how could any one attack him? It does look like a suicide, but, where is the weapon?"

The young girl could only shake her head.

Then an idea occurred to Chopine.

"This is a very old house, countess, and has been the hotel of your family ever since the days of Henry Fourth, our great and good Henry, the Huguenot king. With Henry your ancestor, Francis Morel, surnamed Le Noir, came from Navarre. Francis, the Black, was a great captain, and for his gallant deeds on the battle-field of Ivry, the fatal fight that broke the power of the Catholic League, and gave Henry of Navarre the throne of France, he was made a count and received this mansion as the gift of his grateful king. It was a strange age; and nearly all the dwellings of the prominent men of that time were full of secret passages leading through the walls, and by means of which one acquainted with the secret could enter and leave the hotel without being observed."

"I understand what you mean, doctor, but I do not think any such secret ways exist in this house. In the old chateau, in the country, there is an underground passage, or, at least, tradition says there is one, although I have never discovered it. As a child, with bated breath, horrified at the idea of a secret passage and the dark and bloody mysteries which my young imagination suggested must be connected with such a thing, I have diligently searched for the hidden way."

"And you have never heard anything in regard to any secret passages in this dwelling?"

"Never! and Madame de Moissac, who has been used to the house from childhood, would surely know of the secret ways if there were such things."

"It is wonderful, but I will not rest until I solve the mystery!" Monsieur Chopine declared, all his professional pride roused at being so completely baffled.

Then the two returned to the other apartment.

The doctor had removed the blood, bandaged up the wound, and was administering a strengthening cordial when the two returned.

"You were right, monsieur," remarked the doctor, as Chopine approached. "It is not a suicide but an assassination."

"Aha!" exclaimed the old lawyer, up in arms in a moment.

"The wound is one that could not possibly have been self-inflicted; the ball was discharged from a weapon elevated above the head of the man."

Here was another mystery, and while the lawyer was pondering over it the countess put a question that her tender woman's heart prompted.

"Is the wound a fatal one?—will he die, doctor?"

"The chances are, mademoiselle, that he will; in fact, there is, in my opinion, ninety-nine chances against his recovery, but nature

is a wonderful mistress sometimes, and she laughs at human skill. I have known cases—very rare ones indeed, I beg you to understand—where such a wound as this has not proved mortal, although there was not a medical man who knew anything about the case who would not have been willing to stake his professional reputation upon the man dying. There is, as I have said, one chance in a hundred that he may recover, and we must do all we can. The shock has thrown him into a stupor, and I think he can be removed to a hospital, where he may receive proper treatment, if it is attended to immediately, without endangering him. If I have your permission to act, mademoiselle, I will attend to it at once. I take a great interest in the case, for it is one out of a thousand, and I assure you I will give it all possible attention."

The offer was accepted, and in thirty minutes the unfortunate spy was an inmate of one of the best hospitals that Paris could boast.

After seeing the man safely bestowed, Chopine hurried away to call upon the Detective Queen to relate to her the ill-success of the scheme which she had planned.

La Marmoset was in her usual position, curled up on the sofa, when the lawyer was admitted, and seemed very much annoyed when she learned what had happened.

"Oh, oh, my poor boy!" she cried. "*Mon Dieu!* I shall have to take a look into this matter myself! See here, Papa Chopine, this is a big game that some one is playing; the stakes must be high when they pistol a man. Do you suppose the American affair has anything to do with it?"

"I don't see how that can be; the American is dead and buried—"

"Yes, yes, I know that; don't tell me old stories! But the heir—the girl—is not dead. Did your fine lady-bird of a countess know aught of my pretty locksmith boy?"

"Nothing but that he was a workman come to attend to the locks."

"Then she, or those who are at the back of her, would not try to kill my pretty little rascal when he got on the right scent and was about to discover something which they did not want discovered?"

"No, no! You wrong the countess, and I am her only counselor."

"Well, well; we will see about that. Leave the locksmith to me; I will send a stupid little girl to nurse him, and, when he is able to speak ten words, I'll have the clew I seek."

Satisfied with this assurance, the lawyer departed.

That night a pretty young blonde-haired girl presented herself at the hospital and begged piteously that she might be admitted to tend her unfortunate brother, the locksmith. The guileless face, the innocent ways, won the heart of the old doctor in charge, and her request was granted.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE WIT THAT WINS.

THE superintendent of the hospital to which the unfortunate police spy had been carried—Monsieur Noire—had the reputation of being one of the ablest physicians in Europe, and the ugliest-tempered man in existence.

His name fitted him to a dot; literally translated, *noire* is crotchety, and a more crotchety human than the old "sawbones" could not well be found.

Great was the wonder of the attendants in the hospital when he gave permission for the pretty, though simpleton-like girl to nurse her injured brother.

But the charming face of the maid had ensnared keener and wiser men than the old doctor, and her victory was not to be wondered at when the stake for which she played is considered.

Fortune, however, this time seemed to be frowning upon her; she sat by the bedside of the wounded man, but he lay, apparently, as senseless as the dead, and until he could wake to consciousness, so as to be able to speak, she could not profit by her trouble.

The case of the wounded man appealed most strongly to the professional instincts of the old gentleman. Here was a man with a bullet in his brain—for so a careful inspection seemed to say—yet who was not dead but simply in a state of coma.

To snatch a man wounded so terribly back from the jaws of death which had already opened to receive him, would be indeed a triumph; but after a particular examination the doctor believed it could be done. His eagerness to get to work was apparent; yet, like the epicure who suddenly stumbles upon a rich feast, he could not bear to relish the treat alone; so he dispatched messengers for about a dozen of his professional brothers, and hence it happened that around the bed of the stricken police spy, in six hours after he had entered the hospital, there was gathered a convocation of doctors in busy consultation, not one of whom would have attended such a case, at a private house, for a less fee than a couple of hundred francs.

The girl had retreated to a distance, and with

her beautiful face covered with her apron, was apparently weeping, yet she heard and noted all that took place.

Monsieur Noire dilated upon the case; explained the nature of the wound, and his idea why the ball, instead of producing instant death (which by all the rules of surgery should have followed such a fearful wound), had only thrown the man into this peculiar trance like state; then stated at length the full particulars of the operation which he proposed to perform.

"It is the heroic treatment, gentlemen," he said, in conclusion—"one chance for life and two for death; but if the operation is not performed, nothing can save the man."

To this all agreed, for, after all, if the operation failed, what was the life of this poor wretch of a locksmith compared to the advancement of scientific knowledge?

Eagerly the girl listened.

"Oh, if they will only give him five minutes' speech that I may seize upon the clew which will lead me to the heart of this mystery!" she murmured.

The experiment began—

Ten minutes—

It was over!

The twelve doctors, one after the other, shook gray and wrinkled Noire by the hand and congratulated him.

The operation had been a complete success! The locksmith now had nine chances out of ten for life.

The eminent men departed, each one satisfied that he had witnessed a master-stroke.

Monsieur Noire had received the congratulations of his professional brethren with rare modesty, and after they had departed, saw that the patient was made comfortable and then addressed the girl.

"Cheer up, little one!" he said, in quite a fatherly way; "the operation is over and your brother, I am glad to say, has a chance for life."

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* you have saved him!" Down on her knees went the girl, and she bowed in adoration before the doctor as though he had been the Pope in person. "Oh, what a great man you are!"

The outspoken compliment of this poor innocent child touched the old practitioner much more nearly than the praise of his associates, but he affected to make light of it.

"Get up, get up, my child!" he said, assisting the girl to rise. "It is a trifle, that is all; a trifle when one understands how to handle such a thing."

"Oh, monsieur doctor, it is so wonderful! I can hardly believe it is real!"

"You need not worry about that; it is real enough; your brother, although he is likely to be laid up for some time, is worth a dozen dead men."

"Oh, monsieur, I cannot find words to express my gratitude!" she exclaimed. "My brother and I are alone in the world, no relatives, no friends, and if I lost him I should be helpless indeed."

"I feel perfectly safe in assuring you, *mademoiselle*, that there is very little danger."

"Oh, monsieur doctor, I can hardly explain to you what joy it will give me to hear the voice of my dear brother again. It will be like one returning from the tomb; he will know me now, doctor, will he not, and he will speak to me?"

"No, no!" cried Noire, in alarm, "that mustn't be; the slightest exertion on his part now might be fatal to him. If I allow you to remain here, you must give me your word that you will not permit him to speak to you."

"Oh, yes, I understand, of course, it would be dangerous to-day, but not to-morrow?"

"No, nor to-morrow either; he must not open his mouth under a week!"

A shade passed rapidly over the face of the girl, but it was gone ere even the keen-eyed doctor could observe it.

"A week! Oh, that is too long!"

"His life depends upon it."

"But, there are family matters, and I do not know what to do until he tells me."

"The family matters must wait; his life is more important."

"Oh, what a great stupid I am!" she exclaimed, with the most charming air imaginable. "He can write what he requires me to do."

"Write!" fairly howled the doctor; "if he takes a pen or pencil in his hand under a fortnight I will throw him out of the window!"

"Oh, then he mustn't write, monsieur!" cried the girl, with a horrified air.

"No, he must be kept very quiet, and if I permit you to remain you must promise not to talk much to him, and on no account to allow him to talk to you."

"He shall not speak, monsieur," averred the girl, in a tone of resignation.

"That is a good child," and he patted her on the head as though she were indeed a child instead of a good-sized, buxom girl. "Now you can go and sit by his side, but remember what I have told you."

"Oh, yes, monsieur doctor, and I am so grateful," and dropping a low courtesy the girl

hastened to where the patient reposed and resumed her seat.

The old doctor watched her for a moment and with the muttered observation that she was a very interesting child, he returned to his study.

A wonderful change had taken place in the appearance of the wounded man; the deathlike look had vanished, his eyes were open, and although he seemed in a dreamy condition yet he appeared to comprehend what was going on around him.

"Well, Louis, my pippin, do you know me?" asked the girl, after a cautious glance around, so as to be sure she was not observed. "Don't attempt to speak or to move, for the surgeon who has just operated on you says he will not be answerable for the consequences if you do either, under three or four days, and after you have been dragged back from the threshold of the dark valley we cannot allow you to take any chances. But, I must have some information, and I cannot wait three days for it either, and at the same time I will not put your life in jeopardy, for you have had a narrow enough chance of it as it is. If you understand what I have said, wink, for I don't think that will hurt you."

There was a slight movement of the eyes and the girl nodded "all right," gladly.

"I guess you can tell me what I want to know; I want to get on the track of the rascal who bored that little hole in your head. I cannot allow one of my operators to be used in such a way. Now I will relate what happened to you, and when I am wrong wink, so as to stop me. I must know all the particulars before I am an hour older, and then I will try my luck with the demon that haunts the Hotel de Morel."

CHAPTER XXVII.

WHY THE RUSSIAN WAS NOT KILLED.

To return to the scene of the duel. When the Russian prince fell before the fire of the American both his second and the doctor who had accompanied him believed from the manner of his fall that he was mortally wounded, and therefore it was in perfect good faith that the captain had recommended the Americans to get beyond the frontier as fast as possible.

When the French surgeon reached the side of the fallen man he had fainted, and being quite a young professional, unused to these affairs, had been heedless enough to leave his box of instruments in the carriage, as he had intimated to the American doctor, but, as the vehicle had moved away prudently to quite a little distance from the scene of the encounter, the Frenchman was now obliged to trot off after his tools.

"I will run and get them, although I don't think that they will be of the least use, for I think the man is done for. That American was a dead shot and put a ball right through him!"

The doctor hurried away, and the captain, whose coolness never deserted him, took out his cigar-case and helped himself to a "weed," just as a low moan came from the lips of the fallen man.

"Hallo, hallo!" exclaimed the officer, almost letting his cigar drop in his astonishment; "hang me! if the fellow ain't alive, after all! Why, he must have as many lives as a cat!"

He knelt down by the side of the Russian and as he did so the prince opened his eyes.

"I am not satisfied!" he muttered. "I demand another shot. Help me to stand up and give me another pistol; I will have his heart's blood!"

"Here's a fire-eater for you!" the captain murmured, and then he assisted the Russian to rise to a sitting position, and as he did so an exclamation of astonishment broke from him.

"What is the matter? Why do you cry out like that? and where is my antagonist?" demanded the prince, angrily.

"Only surprised, my dear boy, to find that you are alive, that's all," replied the captain, who recovered himself in an instant.

"Where's the American? I must have another shot! I'll kill the rascal this time."

"Not this time, my dear prince; some other time, and you will have to fire a deuced sight quicker or else you won't hit your man; and in regard to where he is, the chances are that he is on his road to the frontier as fast as he can go. The fact is, prince, he thought he had settled you for this world. You went down with a bullet through your lungs, apparently, and that usually finishes a man so far as this world is concerned. I advised him to get over into either Belgium or Switzerland as soon as he could, and I was just speculating where was the best spot for a gentleman of about my size to betake himself, for I expected your death would kick up a deuce of a row. Why, the doctor even has run off after his instruments so as to extract the ball and give you a chance for your life."

"I am very much obliged to him, but he need not trouble himself on my account."

"Really, my dear boy, your escape is most wonderful," the captain declared, a smile upon his swarthy face. "Why, when I saw you tumble, I would willingly have laid ten to one

that the fellow had bored you through and through, and that you would never stand upon your feet again."

"A slight wound, that is all, but the shock produced a sudden faintness."

"Of course, certainly; but, yonder comes the surgeon; you had better let him examine you and see where the ball is."

"No, no! No need of that; it glanced off after just drawing the blood," protested the Russian, evidently not disposed to submit to an inspection.

"But, I say, old fellow, hadn't you better pretend that you are pretty badly wounded?" the Frenchman asked, a sudden thought occurring to him. "The surgeon believes that you are, and the American has hastened to a more congenial clime under the idea that, having slain you, the police will be after him. Now, if he hears that you are unhurt he will return at once, while, if the report is that you are lingering on the verge of the grave, he will not venture to trust himself on French soil."

The idea was excellent, and the prince adopted it at once.

So when the doctor came up he found the prince leaning upon the captain's shoulder, evidently in great pain.

"We won't need your instruments, doctor," the captain said. "I found the bullet and cut it out with my penknife, as the prince was not able to bear the pain. We old soldiers are good at rough treatment, and now if you will summon the carriage we will get him home as soon as possible. I have bandaged the wound, and although it is an ugly scratch I am in hopes his highness will pull through."

"I told the carriage to follow me," replied the young man, and even as he spoke the vehicle drove up as near as it could get to the spot.

The prince was assisted to get into it, all the time pretending to be very weak and in great pain, and then away they all went for Paris.

When they arrived at the lodgings occupied by the Muscovite, his valet was summoned, and with a great deal of awe he was assisted upstairs and deposited upon his couch.

And after the doctor and valet had departed, the captain sat down in a comfortable easy-chair and gave himself up to a hearty fit of laughter, much to the irritation of the other, who did not relish a laugh at his expense.

"Why do you laugh?" he demanded. "You are acting like an idiot!"

"I cannot help it, my dear fellow; I do not think that in all my life I was ever taken in and done for so cleverly; and then—that devil of an American fleeing for the frontier, thinking that he has killed you and no doubt expecting to be tapped on the shoulder by a gendarme every moment! Oh, it is really too rich! Ha, ha, ha, ha!" And again the captain roared.

"I do not see much cause for merriment!" the Russian exclaimed, savagely.

"No, of course not; but you Muscovites are such deuced cool fellows! You get that from your climate, I presume."

"What do you mean by this folly?"

"Oh, come, old fellow, don't try to humbug me; I am too old a bird. No wonder you were satisfied to fight with pistols, with a shirt of mail on underneath your clothes!"

The other bit his lip in anger at finding that his cowardly trick had been detected, although he believed he could confide in the discretion of the captain, as long as it was not to that worthy's interest to betray him.

The shirt of mail worn next to his skin had saved the Russian's life, for had it not been for the armor, which turned aside the ball, the shot would have been a savage one.

"Oh, come; don't make any bones about the matter!" the officer exclaimed, perceiving how much the other was annoyed at the discovery of his secret. "If you only knew the particulars of some little episodes in my career, you would find that I am as deep in the mud as you are in the mire. But, I say, don't you want me to join forces with you in this little game you are playing? I think I could be of considerable assistance to you, for I have had a great deal of experience in such matters, and now, that you have got the American out of the way, you ought to be able to win the countess."

"Well, it's a bargain; and I will let you in for a share," the Russian said, after thinking the matter over for a moment. "But, can we keep the American away?"

"For a time, yes; I will see that the daily papers are doctored; I will have you lying at the point of death in every news-journal issued to-morrow, and take care that the reports are sent to the foreign papers; and then, if the countess is not disposed to be kind, if fair means will not avail, perhaps I can suggest some foul ones that will."

And so the agreement was reached between the two.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

LA MARMOSET REFUSES.

AGAIN the escaped galley slave, Castiglione, sought an interview with the Detective Queen, and when she learned who was her visitor gave orders for his instant admission.

La Marmoset was not found by her caller curled up on the sofa, as at the first interview, but now hidden away, all muffled up, in a huge arm-chair; her face was bandaged, and she looked very thin and very pale; judging from her appearance, one could easily see that the Detective Queen was not long for this world. The wasted expression of the face and the dark circles around the eyes indicated that the fell destroyer had fastened his clutches firmly upon the daring woman who had been the terror of the rogues of Paris.

Even Castiglione was struck by the change that had occurred during the short time that had elapsed since his last visit.

"Oh, it is you, is it?" she said in a broken and feeble voice, in strong contrast to the rich and powerful tones which she had once enjoyed.

"Yes, but what is the matter with you?"

"Oh, I'm sick, sick of the world—sick of myself—sick of everything! The rat that bit me the other day cut deeper than I thought; he has cut me to the bone; but I sent him back to Toulon for ten years for it, though, and they will break the life out of him long before that time is up, so I suppose I ought to call that account settled."

"You are not fit to work in this condition."

"Fit to work!" she shrieked; "no, I am only fit to die—to lie down in the earth and let the worms prey upon me, just as the humans have ever since I was born!"

"Then you have not done anything in the American matter?"

"Done anything!" she cried; "are you mad? Do you suppose all the gold in the world would drag me into that bloody affair? Why did you kill the old man? The little gold that he had with him surely was not enough inducement to make a man run his neck into the hands of the executioner."

"What?" cried the man, in astonishment, "do you think that I killed the American?"

"Of course—who else?"

"The Italians, so the police say."

"Bah! the police are blind. Why should they murder the man? You and your gang were the Italians; yours was the head that planned the deed, although, perhaps, other hands executed it."

"You are out of your senses to charge me with the crime!" he cried, impatiently. "What object was there for me to do or to plan such a deed?"

"He had important documents concealed upon his person, so I was told at headquarters, and you desired those papers to back up the false girl whom you intend to present as the heiress of the fifty millions of francs; but there, too, was another reason why you desired the American out of the way: he would be sure to detect the trick immediately and denounce the cheat, but the dead—the dead speak not."

"Upon my soul, La Marmoset, as I am a living, breathing man, I do not know aught of how the American came to his death."

"Well, well, perhaps I wrong you, but I am sick and peevish, and I see blood in everything now."

Castiglione saw that the woman was a complete wreck, and thought that it was an idle waste of time to converse with her. La Marmoset never more would make the rogues of the great city tremble with her daring deeds!

"I presume, then, that you have not taken any steps in the matter in regard to which I came to see you originally?"

"Oh, yes, I have, and it makes me laugh to think how well I succeeded, ha, ha, ha!" and as she attempted to laugh it broke into a hoarse cough.

The man began to think that her senses were deserting her.

"I do not comprehend; how well did you succeed?"

"See! you wanted a girl to personate the heiress lost long ago here in Paris—Morel's daughter—the girl captured by the Indians when the massacre of Tampa took place, ransomed from the savages by a French trader, and by him brought here to Paris and lost in this great whirlpool."

"Yes; that is what I desired."

"I found the very creature for you, a look in her face reveals the proud patrician blood; but it will not work—it will not work," and the woman shook her head mournfully.

"Why will it not work? Where is this girl? When can I see her?" cried the man, eagerly.

"Do I not tell you the scheme is good for nothing?"

"Let me be the judge as to that; only tell me where the girl is to be found."

"Oh! you will accomplish miracles, eh, but you will not in this case. You cannot make this girl pretend that she is the long-lost heiress."

"She is inclined to be obstinate, then; but perhaps you did not offer her enough. For such a thing a high price must be paid. Let me try my arts upon her."

"You will fail!"

"Why are you so sure of that?" cried he, very much nettled by the positive statement.

"Why? Can't you guess? Oh, how blind you must be! This girl I found lost in the streets of this great city will not pretend to be

the heiress of Morel, because in very truth she is the heiress!"

Castiglione stared like one astounded by a stroke of thunder; such a thing as the true heiress being discovered had never occurred to him.

"Aha! You see now, eh? You see how truly I speak when I say the game is not worth the candle!"

"How happened you to discover the girl?" Castiglione asked at last, bitterly disappointed.

"By mere accident; I came across her at night on the Boulevard Italienne; her face attracted my attention, and I entered into conversation with her. You know the old saying—it is the unexpected that always happens—and so, when I sketched to her the story of the life of the heiress of Morel (she had told me that she was an orphan and knew very little of her early years), her face lighted up, and she said: 'Madame, (I had my grand togs on then like a dame, you know) I believe the story you have related is the story of my life.' *Pardieu!* You could have knocked me down with a feather!"

"How do you know this girl isn't an impostor?" demanded the man, incredulously.

"Oh no; truth speaks in her voice if truth ever was heard in the tones of a human being!"

"Well, what is there to prevent me from taking this girl?" Castiglione asked, after a few moments' thought. "Of course, with a false heiress, standing upon the uncertain ladder of lies, that the master-mind erects, better terms could be made, because if she was ugly a single twist of the ladder would bring her headlong to the ground, and, after all, even with the true girl there ought to be some pretty pickings out of fifty millions of francs."

"None for you, dear friend!"

"And why not?"

"Because, for once in my life I acted like an honest woman, and instead of giving the innocent dove into your clutches I sent her to those who will look out for her."

"You are no friend of mine then!" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I am, and now I will give you a proof of it," replied the woman. "You are in danger, and unless you quit Paris *instantly* the galleys await you!" And she lowered her voice to a whisper as she spoke, as if fearful the very wall might overhear the speech.

The man was startled.

"The galleys?" he repeated.

"Yes; the detectives are hot on your track. I could have put the 'bracelets' on you two days ago, but, just as I was about to spring the trap on you, I penetrated your disguise, and to my amazement discovered who you were. Then for the sake of the old time I not only spared you but I sent the rest of the hounds on a false scent. But, it won't last long; you have played too bold a game; the net is slowly gathering around you, and if you are not quickly gone all escape will be cut off."

There was incredulity on the man's face.

"La Marmoset, I will be honest with you and say that I doubt this story. Give me some proof that it is true!"

"A word does that; name to me the man who broke the bank at Frascati a month ago, the red coming ten times in succession."

"Enough! I believe and thank you. Farewell, for it is not likely that we will ever meet again in this world!"

"But, I'll save a warm corner for you below!"

Castiglione departed, the shrill laugh of La Marmoset ringing, mockingly, in his ears.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED VISITOR.

FOR once in his life Jacques Rinot had gone straight to the end which he had in view instead of reaching it by a serpentine course as was his fashion.

As the reader will remember, both the criminal lawyer and his clerk had a suspicion that the Countess of Morel either directly or indirectly had had something to do with the disappearance of the American, and now Rinot "took the bull by the horns," and went directly to visit Chopine.

The old lawyer was surprised by the call and was still more surprised when Rinot made known his business.

"I have come to see you about this American case, Monsieur Chopine," Rinot began, "and as we are to a certain extent in the same boat, I thought it would be as well if we had a little confidential chat in regard to it."

"Certainly," responded Chopine, at a loss to understand what this meant.

"You have read the newspaper accounts of the affair, and, possibly, like myself have been to police headquarters to get the particulars from Monsieur Preval himself."

Chopine admitted that he had.

"Now, what do you think of it? Who killed the American?"

"Well, it seems as if the Italians had some hand in the matter. Monsieur Preval is sure of it."

"In my experience I have known Monsieur Preval to be sure of some things which after-

ward proved to be quite the contrary from what he had expected."

The old advocate did not attempt to defend the minister of police; he knew that the accusation was correct.

"Now, to come right to business, and without meaning any offense, Monsieur Chopine, is there anybody in the world who would profit more by the American's death than your client, the Countess of Morel?"

"*Mon Dieu!* Monsieur Rinot, you cannot be in your senses when you encourage such a horrible suspicion!"

"I am not encouraging any suspicion; I am simply asking a question. You need not answer it, of course, unless you wish so to do. I have come to you in the frankest manner. I will not keep anything back, but speak right out the thoughts that are in my mind."

"But, I will answer it—I am glad to get the chance to answer it. Neither the American's life nor death had aught to do with the Countess of Morel."

"Living he threatened to wrest from her the estates of Morel."

"His death did not diminish the danger; it is the heir that claims—the daughter of the Count of Morel."

"Yes, but the American was the one who intended to push the claims."

"His death makes no difference, as far as I can see. The story of the lost heir of Morel is now public property and there are now probably a thousand people in France all eagerly searching for the girl."

"But the American had on his person when he disappeared all the papers relating to the girl, and when the body was exhumed in the cellar these were gone."

"I think there must be some mistake about that statement," Chopine remarked, evidently weighing his words. "From what little I know of the American I do not think he would be foolish enough to carry such valuable papers on his person; it appears to me altogether improbable. He may have had copies with him, but I have grave doubts in regard to the originals."

Rinot laughed.

"You are right, Monsieur Chopine; he had no original papers with him; the documents he carried were but copies, regularly certified, of course; the originals are in America. So if the American was murdered for the purpose of obtaining and destroying the documents, the murderers only had their labor for their pains."

"I trust, Monsieur Rinot, you did not have so bad an opinion of me as to believe that I would lend myself in any way, shape, or manner, to such an atrocious scheme?" Chopine asked, with a great deal of dignity.

"No, Monsieur Chopine; believe me, I did not. Even if the deed was perpetrated to aid the Countess of Morel to retain her estates, I felt sure that you would not countenance it in any way."

"But you have a slight suspicion against the countess, eh?" and Chopine laughed, for the idea to him was most absurd.

"Oh, no; I will not admit such a suspicion; but she might have some humble friend—some servitor or hanger-on to the estates, who, perhaps, would think he was doing his mistress a service by committing this bloody deed."

"Oh, no, Monsieur Rinot; the countess has very few servants, and all of them are good, honest people. But, to give you an idea of how the countess regards this matter, permit me to read her instructions to me in regard to the case." And the lawyer took a letter from his desk and read it aloud, as follows:

"DEAR MONSIEUR CHOPINE:

In regard to the claimant to the estate of my uncle of whom you write, please have an interview with the American gentleman. If the story be truth—if my cousin is alive, there will not be any need of a legal contest, for I will freely yield up what does not to me rightfully belong.

(Signed) MARIE ANTOINETTE MOREL."

"A noble letter!" Rinot exclaimed, surprised out of his usual reserve.

"Believe me, monsieur, she means it, every word. I ask you, now, do you think the woman who, of her own free will, could write such a letter would stoop to league herself with assassins?"

"No, monsieur; I am satisfied that my suspicions are unworthy ones; but it is a terrible mystery—this bloody taking off of General Calhoun, and the police seem to be completely at fault. In fact, Monsieur Preval admitted to me to-day that he had about given up all hope of solving the dreadful riddle. It seems that the person upon whom he chiefly relied, his ablest police spy, La Marmoset, is lying at the point of death."

"So I heard to-day. It is a pity, for she is said to be worth any half-dozen of the force together."

Then Monsieur Rinot took his departure, more in the dark than ever.

When he arrived at his office he discussed the matter fully with Camion.

The clerk still clung obstinately to his belief that the deed was done in the interest of the countess of Morel, but Rinot wavered in regard to this.

While they were busily engaged in talking

the matter over, one of the junior clerks came with a message that a young lady would like to see M. Rinot in private, upon important business.

Camion at once retreated to his own domain, and the other clerk ushered the lady into the room.

It was a well-proportioned girlish figure, clad entirely in deep black, and with the face closely veiled, that entered. The attire was poor, yet not shabby.

"You are Monsieur Rinot?" the lady asked, in deep, musical tones, which sounded more pleasantly to the ears of the lawyer than the voice of any being of womankind that had ever fallen upon his ears.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

The caller removed her veil. Rinot had been prepared by the wonderful voice to expect that the girl—for that she was only a girl he was sure—was pretty, but the face that he beheld astonished him.

She was no Frenchwoman; the olive-tinged skin, tinted by the hot kisses of the loving sun in a land warmer by far than even the sunny plains of France, plainly revealed that; curly-curling, red-gold hair, so wonderful a contrast to the dark skin, played upon the forehead, and the eyes in their depths resembled the ocean, when the sunbeams dance and play upon its surface.

It was the face of an enchantress.

"Do you recognize me, Monsieur Rinot?"

"I do not, mademoiselle, I regret to say; have we ever met before?"

"No; yet I called in answer to your pressing entreaties."

"Indeed, mademoiselle, I blush to say I do not remember—"

"I am Tampa Morel!"

CHAPTER XXX.

OVER THE FRONTIER.

ACTING upon the advice of Morillian, the two Americans lost no time in getting out of the limits of France.

Although dueling is strictly prohibited by law, yet when no serious result ensues, the authorities rarely trouble their heads about the matter, but if the meeting results in the death of one of the contending parties the police are forced, for appearance sake, to make a time about it.

It is a perfect farce, though, and the police inquiry is seldom attended with any important results.

The Americans had lived long enough in Paris to understand this, and therefore when they took their hasty departure, they apprehended that their banishment would not last long, even if the Russian died from the wound.

Their doctor had promised to keep them posted in regard to how matters went in Paris, and although they tore themselves away from the gay city with regret, yet they knew the imperative necessity of absence; so they went with as good a grace as they could muster.

Dunbar had confided to his friend the particulars of his interview with the countess, and admitted that, if the interview had not taken place, he would not have journeyed toward the frontier with so light a heart.

They left Paris the very night of the encounter and proceeded directly to Switzerland.

The old historic city of Geneva had been selected as an abiding place, and after the line of the frontier was passed, and they were in the territory of the free Switzers, the pair breathed more freely.

In Geneva they procured lodgings in an obscure part of the town—both being well acquainted with the city—taking the precaution to assume false names, and there, impatiently, they waited for intelligence from Paris.

The first that reached them came in the shape of the Parisian journals. Nearly all gave a florid account of the "affair of honor," vaingloriously the personality of the parties with initials, but for all that, describing them so exactly that one acquainted with the parties could not fail in identifying them.

The wound of the Russian was described as a dangerous one, and the reports ended by saying his death might be expected at any moment, and that the police, having received instructions, were in search of the victor, although it was believed he would not be arrested, as it had been ascertained that he had quitted Paris and it was supposed he had taken refuge in Belgium.

Gordon read the report aloud and Dunbar looked most decidedly downcast when he finished.

"By Jove! old fellow, it is lucky that we cut out!" Gordon exclaimed.

"Yes; if we had not, the chances are about a hundred to one we would have been enjoying the hospitalities of a French dungeon about this time, although it is impossible to always judge correctly from these accounts in the newspapers," Dunbar observed, thoughtfully. "These French journalists are such inveterate romancers; from the barest little affair they will construct a three-volume novel."

"Unmitigated liars, in fact!" chimed in the other, busily engaged in running over the accounts of the encounter in the other newspapers. "But I am afraid they have not indulged in their peculiar propensity this time as much as usual, for all the accounts are just about alike; there is no material difference in them, and of course if the accounts were highly exaggerated there would be considerable difference in the particulars."

A resemblance that need not have been alarming to the Americans had they known that the ready-witted captain had taken care to visit all the news offices and that from him the journalists had received their information.

"It is deuced unlucky!" Dunbar exclaimed, "to be shut out of Paris just at the time when there is a strong reason for my being there."

"Oh, don't be afraid; she will wait for you, old fellow, and when you come to reflect over the matter, this encounter, although it has banished you from Paris for the time being, is one of the luckiest things for you that could have happened, for you and the lady might have gone on for weeks and months without coming to an understanding; but, as it is, all you have to do is to wait for this affair to blow over then return to the city to meet with a hearty welcome."

"Well, I don't know but what you are right; it is a rather consoling thought," Dunbar replied, his face lighting up a little.

Next day a letter arrived from the young doctor, and Dunbar read it aloud for the edification of his companion:

"MY DEAR COMRADES," wrote Morillian, "I presume, before this reaches you, you will have perused the Parisian journals, and to the very complete account given by them I have but little to add. But how the deuce the newspaper rats got all the particulars is a mystery, unless, indeed, that swaggering wretch of a captain has been blabbing, and from what I know of him it would not surprise me if he has betrayed the particulars of the affair. A fellow of his kidney has no more sense of honor than a jackal. As in duty bound by the laws of politeness, I called upon the Russian to inquire in regard to his condition, but was not permitted to see him. The captain received me and in a very doleful manner said he was fearing the worst—that eminent medical authority had declared the prince could not certainly live more than twenty-four more hours at the utmost. In my innocent way I inquired the names of these eminent doctors; whereupon the gentleman pretended to think that the question was an aspersion upon himself, flew into a violent rage, and requested me to retire. I did so, after a brief exchange of compliments; and, by-the-by, I should not be surprised if it led to the redoubtable captain and your humble servant taking a quiet walk in the forest some day. If we do, I hope to be able to show him that, as a preliminary to the art of curing wounds, I was taught how to give them. But of this, more anon. Briefly, then, in order to wind up this lengthy screed—as far as any one can find out, the prince may have got off with a slight flesh wound. The police have not been instructed to arrest you. I have this from the best authority. Tomorrow a sharp lad of mine in disguise will endeavor to get into the house so as to see how the man is, in truth. Therefore in three days at the latest expect to receive news that you can rely upon. Ever your friend,

"MORILLIAN."

"He's a brick!" exclaimed Gordon, "a perfect brick, if ever there was one."

"Three days more of suspense and then we will know how soon it will be safe for us to return to Paris," repeated Dunbar, his face joyful at the thought of return to the city which contained the woman he adored.

The three passed laggingly away, but, instead of a letter, on the evening of the third day, the young doctor arrived in person.

After the usual greetings Morillian explained why he had taken the trip.

"I couldn't very well write all the particulars," he said, "and as I haven't taken a vacation for some time I thought I would steal a couple of days' time and run on in person. There is some deep game afoot in this matter, although I confess I am utterly in the dark as to what it is. You remember I wrote you that I had set a sharp rascal on the track and felt sure he would find out the truth about the prince's wound. The fellow succeeded, as I was sure he would, and his report is that the Russian is up and around his lodging just the same as if he was in perfect health, when there isn't any one present, but when there are visitors he receives them in bed, pretending to be at his last extremity."

The friends looked at each other.

"What the deuce does it mean?" Gordon asked, bewildered.

Dunbar's keen wits guessed the prince's game.

"It is a trick to keep me away from Paris!" he exclaimed. "That is the meaning of it. While he lies at the point of death, liable to pass away at any time, he knows that I will not dare to return."

"But, what good does that do him?" Gordon asked.

"Some design afoot which my presence in the city will hinder."

"My own thought exactly!" Morillian exclaimed, "and that is why I came to Geneva—to advise you to return—but in disguise—and watch this Russian."

The advice was good. An hour later the three were on the road to Paris.

CHAPTER XXXI.

KNOWLEDGE UNDER DIFFICULTIES.

LUCKILY for the purposes of the female spy, who had in such a crafty manner gained access to the bedside of the wounded locksmith in the hospital, the position in which his couch was placed was at the extreme end of the left wing of the building, quite a distance from the other patients, and there was no danger of the interview between the two being overheard.

Although, as a rule, the female spy was like a woman of ice—for she was not the young, childish thing she appeared—yet on the present occasion she was in a fever of impatience.

Time—valuable time was flying fast, and she had a presentiment that if she did not manage to act quickly all her labor would be for naught.

"We'll get at the truth, don't fear, my jewel. I will avenge you, and there is no danger of your dying of this scratch!" she reassured him.

"Monsieur, the doctor, is a very learned man. He would bring you back to life even if you had one foot in the grave. So don't fear for the result. He says that you are worth a hundred dead men. Oh! my pretty boy, you will live to snap the bracelets on the wrists of a thousand rascals yet, and in time to make a name that will stand with the master thief-catcher, great Vidocq, on the roll of fame. But now to work; and if I tire you shut your eyes tight—as tight as you can—for that must not be, even if the wretch who shot you is afforded a chance to escape; but I will hunt him down in time, never fear, and then we will send him to the galleys at Toulon, where he will have plenty of time to meditate upon the folly of attempting to rub out one of my prettiest and smartest boys!"

A bright expression which came into the eyes of the wounded man showed that he fully appreciated her words.

"Now, you went with Monsieur Chopine to the Hotel Morel. He introduced you as a locksmith, and you were escorted to the apartments of mademoiselle, the countess. You locked the door behind you and then proceeded to work. A man was concealed in the apartment—"

Quick as a flash came the warning wink.

"Oho, I am on the wrong track then?" quoth the woman, who was keeping a keen watch upon the man's face. "You discovered a secret door—"

Again came the wink.

"Oh, *mon Dieu!* Why can't you speak, my little man?" she cried, impatiently. "If you could only speak or write, in one little sentence you could tell me what I want to know. I fear I shall not be able to guess, for if there was not a man concealed in the room—" the man winked instantly—"or if you did not discover a secret panel—" again the wink—"wherein a man was concealed—" another wink—"who attempted to murder you so as to prevent you from revealing the secret—" three strong winks, plainly signifying that she was on the wrong track—"then I am utterly at fault!"

There was a sympathetic look in the stony glare of the man's eyes which said that if he only had the use of his tongue for a minute he could expound the riddle.

For a few minutes the woman sat in silence and looked longingly at the impassive face, her mind busy in thought.

Suddenly a shrill exclamation escaped from her lips.

"Peste! I am a dull-headed fool not to have thought of it before!" she exclaimed, for a way out of the difficulty had occurred to her. She had hit upon a plan!

Drawing a pencil from her pocket and a memorandum-book, "See!" she said, displaying the book and pencil, "we will play school for a while. I will make the alphabet on one of these pages; then with the pencil I will pass from letter to letter and you must spell me out what I want to know. When the pencil touches the right letter you must wink."

There was a joyful look in the man's eyes and a violent movement of the lids showing that he understood what was expected of him and approved the plan.

"Then, attention!" ordered the female spy, after she had finished the letters, holding the page up for his inspection, "let me see how well you can tell your story although you have been deprived of the use of both tongue and fingers."

The experiment which this woman of wit had devised was a complete success, and this was the story the wounded man told, spelled out slowly, letter by letter:

"I locked the door. I looked about. Outside window a large tree. Climber could ascend this and enter window. Opposite wall was unbroken except for door into the ante-room, thence to maid's apartment. In her room two closets took up space between ante-room and the main hall. Was satisfied that closets did not occupy all space by three-quarters of a meter. That meant secret closet or passage in the wall. Looked for entrance in main apartment in unbroken wall. Found spot on wall like stain of blood one meter from floor. On right track. Man who had entered room had hurt hand and imprinted blood-spot on wall. Opening and shutting of secret door explained clang which countess heard. Sounded wall by blood-spots; then shot

rung through room and bullet cut into head. That is all."

The girl had spelt this out slowly, letter by letter, with the most careful attention.

"I have it now, my tulip!" she exclaimed, joyfully. "You were right—you were hot on the scent; there is a secret closet or passage in the wall, and some one was either concealed there, and shot you through some peep-hole in the wall, or else the pistol was in position, carefully arranged, so that any attempt to open the door would cause its discharge. I must have a look into this affair myself. I will give monsieur's pistol a chance to make a pretty little hole in my head, and the quicker I set about it the better. Keep up your spirits, and when I return it will either be to seek the hospitalities of this establishment as a badly wounded police spy, or else with the secret of the Hotel Morel in my possession."

It was not a difficult matter for this accomplished woman to frame some excuse for leaving the hospital, and two hours later the lawyer, Monsieur Chopine, was waited upon in his office by a stupid-looking youth who appeared to be a German and who carried a small bag of tools in his hand.

The boy brought a note from La Marmoset, stating that she had sent this lad, another locksmith, to take up the task which had resulted so dismally to the first workman.

Chopine took a look at the boy and thought to himself that she had chosen a strange fellow if she expected to solve the mystery which lurked in the apartment of the countess; but, that was the Detective Queen's business and not his, and so he immediately conducted the dull youth who could not "speak very goot," to the hotel. There he was taken to the room, which, since the accident to the locksmith, had been abandoned by the young lady. The lawyer shook his head as the door closed behind the lad, and he heard him turn the key in the lock on the inside, but Chopine, with all his acuteness, had not guessed that this stupid was La Marmoset in person, determined to get to the very heart of the mystery.

CHAPTER XXXII.

A DISCOVERY.

"Oh, oh!" cried the disguised spy, abruptly, a sudden idea flashing through her brain as she stood in the center of the apartment and surveyed the wall before her with eyes that seemed almost sharp enough to penetrate it. "I have it, I have it! How simple, yet how cunningly contrived, and what a dull head I have not to have thought of it before! There is no one here—no one on the watch to assassinate the explorer who seeks to discover the secrets of the Hotel Morel. Oh no; but in place of a man a bit of machinery that works with human skill. I have heard of such things before, in these old palaces. My cunning rogue was assassinated by machinery. Clever as he is he was contending with one more clever still. The user of this secret passage feared that his secret might be discovered, and in order that the interloper might be taught a bloody lesson, he arranged the machinery that controls the opening of the door so that a pistol would be discharged, point-blank, at any one attempting to enter. That is the secret of my fellow's assassination, and now I must be on my guard lest a similar fate befall me. In feeling about the wall, seeking to discover the secret spring which would open the concealed door, he touched the lever that discharged the pistol. The pistol was arranged at about the level of an ordinary man's breast; he was stooping and therefore received the ball in his head."

This strange creature was as sure that she had hit upon the truth as though she had certain information as to the fact.

She proceeded with the utmost caution, muttering her thoughts aloud after the fashion common to her as she inspected the wall.

"Where is the spring which opens the door, and where the one which discharges the pistol? The weapon may not have been reloaded since my rascal got its contents, but I won't risk that, for it may have been recharged, or it may be a double-barreled weapon. The lever which fires the pistol is certainly more easy to find than the one which opens the door, or else the contriver of the murderous affair is not as cunning as I think."

The wall was covered with rich velvet paper, heavily embossed after the fashion common to the time when paper was first introduced into France for wall decorating, and the artists endeavored in the cheaper material to excel the work of the deft fingers that wrought the old-time silken and velvet hangings.

The paper was of dark green color with a wealth of golden-hued vines running riot over it.

"In some obscure spot lurks the spring which moves the lever," the spy muttered, examining the surface of the wall with eager eyes, yet careful not to run her fingers heedlessly over it. "It should be about on the level of the breast. Aha!"

The exclamation was produced by a sudden

discovery which her keen eyes had made. She had reasoned that the concealed mechanism was worked by a button placed in one of the sunken places of the paper, and that the repeated pressure of a human finger upon the button would be apt, in time, despite the dark color of the paper, to slightly discolor it; she had detected a faint spot upon the wall, such as she had expected to find.

"Now the pistol is directly in range of this spot or else it would not harm any one seeking to discover the secret," the queen continued. "Hence, if I withdraw to one side and at arm's length examine it, if my manipulations discharge the pistol, or whatever kind of firearm it is, my precious person will not be apt to be damaged"—which inference the girl immediately proceeded to test.

Closer examination disclosed that the soiled spot was the head of a small button, which in reality projected slightly enough to allow any one with small fingers to grasp it, by pressing in the velvety pile of the paper, which was extremely heavy.

"Now then, what would the average mortal do upon discovering the existence of this button?" she queried, as if debating the subject with a second party. "What are buttons for, used in connection with secret panels? To press upon, of course! You press upon the button; hey presto! open flies the door and you are master of the secret! That is surely what my pretty boy thought; he pressed upon the button and immediately received a bullet in his head for his pains." And then this detective genius laughed, as though she thought the murderous surprise which the contriver of the secret mechanism had arranged to be an excellent jest.

"No, no! clearly I shall not press upon the button. How else can it be used? Three other motions, only, possible. It can be shoved to one side—twisted around like a key or pulled out, but no pressure, for that is dangerous. First to see if it will move."

With her fingers she made the trial, but the button appeared to be as solid as though it was a fixture.

"Not to the right, nor to the left, and neither up nor down," she muttered. "Now will it revolve?"

But it would not; the secret was not yet in her possession.

"Out you must come, then!" and as the fingers nimbly exerted themselves to obey the instructions, out did come the button, which was the head of a small, strong steel rod. When two inches of the rod had emerged from the wall there was a sharp click! click! as though machinery had been set in motion; the rod became immovable, and slowly a small iron door in the wall swung open, disclosing a dark and narrow passage and a flight of steps leading evidently into the underground region. But this was not all which the opening of the iron door disclosed. A heavy, old-fashioned pistol, with a lever attached to the trigger, was so arranged that—as the female spy had surmised—any attempt to open the door by pressing upon the button would have driven the end of the steel rod against the mechanism and thus have caused the discharge of the weapon.

The end of the rod was curved into a hook, and the pulling out of the button caused the hook to catch upon a projecting lever, which set in operation the machinery that drew back the bolts of the iron door and allowed it to swing open.

And when the door was open, the mystery as to how the pistol-ball had found its way through the iron without leaving any trace of its passage—a mystery which had puzzled the acute mind of the female spy more than she would have cared to have acknowledged—was explained. When the door was closed, the muzzle of the pistol was brought against a little hole, just as large as the bore of the weapon, and covered by a tiny piece of iron working on a loose hinge.

When the pistol was discharged, the door, or curtain, was lifted by the shock, and after the ball had passed through it fell back again into its place.

A more ingeniously arranged apparatus than this secret door the Detective Queen, with all her varied professional experience, had never beheld.

"At last the secret is mine!" La Marmoset exclaimed, triumphantly.

A glance at the pistol had told her that it was unloaded, and therefore the place had not been visited, by the person who had so alarmed the countess by his nocturnal entrance into her apartment, since the disguised spy had been shot.

"Who is it? who is it?" quoth La Marmoset; "whence does this passage lead—for what is it used, and by whom? Am I about to discover something that will make me master of the secrets of the house of Morel and enable me to clear away the cloud that now enshrouds the missing heir?"

Evidently the woman believed that she was upon the threshold of an important discovery, and she took every possible precaution to make her mission successful.

From the bosom of her blouse she drew a tiny

dark-lantern, one of the bull's-eye pattern, which, despite its size, gave quite a powerful light; and also produced a medium-sized revolver.

Carefully she examined the weapon, clicking the cylinder around so as to be sure that the barrels were charged and in perfect order. Then she lit the lantern and descended the narrow stairs, flashing the light on ahead, driving the darkness before her.

Straight down went the passage, and the spy followed it until she was sure she was below the surface of the earth; when it ended, she found herself in a narrow apartment, extremely like a dungeon, with neither door nor window in it as far as could be seen.

Nothing but four bare stone walls, but in one corner of the room was a stool and an old table upon which lay a large pocket-book and half-a-dozen or more of legal-looking papers.

With a cry of joy La Marmoset rushed toward them.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

A STRANGE STORY.

"TAMPA MOREL—Tampa Morel!" exclaimed the advocate, hardly able to believe that his ears had served him aright, so completely astonished was he by this entirely unexpected avowal.

"Yes, monsieur; that is my name."

"Upon my word, mademoiselle, you will pardon my surprise, but I assure you I am utterly astounded. Here I have been searching all Paris for you—in fact, I may say, all through France, and have even pushed my inquiries across the channel in England—in London, and all without the slightest results, and now you come upon me without the least warning. I have advertised for you in all the leading journals, have circulated thousands after thousands of handbills; but stay, perhaps it is to one of these devices of mine that I am indebted for the pleasure of your company to-day?"

"Oh, no," she replied, with a shake of the head. "I seldom read the newspapers and I have never seen any of the handbills to which you refer, although I have lived in Paris a long time; and then, if I had seen them it is not probable I should have known that I was the person referred to, for it is only recently—very recently indeed, I have learned what I was and who I am."

"That is strange!" he observed; and now, the first surprise over, he began to have a desire to cross-examine the claimant in order to see if she really was what she pretended.

"Yes, it is strange, but it is the truth. I was brought up in total ignorance of my birth and parentage;—not that I was told there was any mystery about my birth, for that would naturally have excited my suspicions and have provoked me to solve the mystery. A falsehood easily covered up all traces. If you will have patience to listen I will relate to you all I know of my life."

The wily Rinot said he would be delighted to be so entertained. To allow the girl to tell her own story in her own way would give him, on the watch to detect discrepancies, a fine chance to decide whether the story was true or false.

"Until recently I believed that my name was Camille Bienville, and that I was the daughter of Auguste Bienville, who was a French trader at Eau Gallie in Florida."

"In America?" added the lawyer, as the girl paused. "Ah, yes, I have heard of him."

"Yes, in America; and now, to go back to the tender years of my childhood, my first remembrance is of a log-house, overgrown with trailing vines, looking out upon a vast expanse of deep blue water, that washed upon a sandy shore of dazzling whiteness."

"That is your earliest recollection," observed the lawyer, drawing a blank sheet of paper in front of him upon the desk, behind which he sat, and beginning to take notes.

"Yes, sir, that was my childhood's home."

"And those who were around you?"

"Ah, monsieur, my memory does not serve me as well in regard to the faces," she replied, with a sigh. "The little I can remember is so vague and indistinct it is almost impossible for me to separate the real from the unreal; to say which is truth and which is imagination. I seem to remember a low-voiced, sweet-faced lady, with dark eyes and hair, who used to lull me to sleep with plaintive melodies, and a tall, stately man, with jet-black hair, but streaked here and there with gray threads, who carried me in his arms and around whose knees I played in happy, childish glee."

The lawyer nodded, approvingly, as he jotted down the particulars. The description fitted the account of Morel and his American wife exactly.

"Your father and mother, no doubt."

"On that point I have been in a maze which now seems to be clearing away; you will understand as I go on."

"Yes, yes; go on, I beg."

"The next memory that comes back to me from the vista of years long past is of the painted, plumed red-men of the Everglades, the savage Seminole warriors, their squaws and children. With them I dwelt in the wilderness and shared their wild life; how long I cannot tell;

When there came a sudden change, and again I was in a log-house on the borders of the sea."

"The same as before, I presume?" remarked the lawyer, no tone in his voice betraying how important was the question.

"Oh, no; a different place entirely; not so wild, more of a settlement, and the house in which I dwelt was also used as a shop, and in that place I remained until I was about ten years old. It was the home of the French trader, Auguste Bienville, my father, so I was taught to call him, at Eau Gallie."

"And the woman of whom you spoke, also the man, not old, yet whose black hair was thickly tinged with gray—were these two at Eau Gallie?"

"No; I never saw them there; and I can remember once questioning my father about them, and even then, child that I was, I noticed he was disconcerted by my girlish curiosity. At first he rebuked me for troubling him, and seemingly having come to the conclusion that if he did not satisfy me I would be apt to brood over the matter, he explained that the dark-haired woman was my mother, and that she had been killed by the savages at the time when they attacked the settlement and had carried me off a prisoner. As for the man he pretended not to remember exactly who he was, but said he supposed he was one of the Indian traders who used to make the trading-house a head-quarters when they were not absent in the wilderness."

"The explanation satisfied you, I presume?"

"Oh, yes; I was but a child, and what reason had I to question the word of a man whom I regarded as a parent? When I was about fifteen years old my father—I give the French trader that title, although now I feel sure that he was no relative of mine at all—closed up his business affairs in Florida and set sail for France. And on the voyage, while under the influence of liquor—he was a hard drinker and seldom retired sober to his bed—he often boasted to me that he intended to make a grand *coup* in Paris, and at a single stroke achieve great wealth; and then he would appeal to me and ask me if by any chance we should be separated would I not always love and be grateful to him—the man who had so tenderly reared and cared for me? Even to my untutored girlish mind his words seemed to cover some dark mystery, although of course at that time I had not the faintest suspicion as to what it was; but now I think I understand it all clearly. Whether he knew that I was the daughter of the Count of Morel or not, when he ransomed me from my captivity amid the savages, I do not know and have no way of ascertaining, but that he did know who and what I was before we sailed on the voyage to France I am certain, and his purpose in coming to France was to sell me to my family. This was the grand *coup* that he expected to make. As the only child of my father I would be entitled to all the family estates."

A cunning look came into the eyes of the advocate at this point in the narrative. He saw that the girl, and the French trader, too, if her story was true, were possessed of the idea that the family estate of the Count of Morel in France was large, when in truth it was quite the contrary.

But this fact, in the shrewd mind of the lawyer, argued well for the truth of the girl's tale, for if she was an impostor, and was not the long-lost heir, she would have taken pains to become familiar with all the particulars appertaining to the family with whom she claimed kindred.

"Yes, yes, I see."

"Heaven, though, frowned upon the trader and his scheme," the girl continued. "Before we reached the shores of France a terrible storm overtook the ship in which we had sailed; the waves ran mountains high, while the lightning flashed and the thunder rolled. I was on my knees in an agony of fear when my protector rushed into the cabin and cried out that the ship was sinking and that we must take to the long-boat. We did so, and hardly had we got a hundred yards from the vessel which we had deserted when a huge wave so nearly overturned the boat that all in it were cast upon the mercy of the angry water; but Heaven was kind to me and willed that I should escape while strong men perished. An oar came in my way; in the desperation of despair I clung to it until I drifted against the boat, which had again righted; I clambered into it and fainted."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE SECRET MARKS.

"DEAR me, dear me!" exclaimed the lawyer, very much interested in the story; and his experienced mind, used to sifting truth from falsehood, instantly decided that, if the tale was fiction, never in all his professional experience had he listened to one so wonderfully like truth; "this is really extraordinary!"

"When I awoke from my swoon I found myself in the cabin of a vessel with strange faces bending kindly over me. I had been rescued by a ship, which, passing safely through the terrible storm, had noticed the boat drifting

aimlessly over the waste of water and had sailed near to it, suspecting that aid was needed. Heaven had sent the ship to my aid, and in its wisdom had ruled that I alone of all on board the doomed vessel should escape from the fury of the elements. It was a French ship, too, and so at once I found myself among friends. I told the captain my sad story, my father buried beneath the waves—for of course at that time I had no suspicion that Auguste Bienville was not my sire—I was utterly alone in the world, and I had often heard him say that he had not a single relative living. The kind-hearted sailor told me not to be downcast, but to cheer up, for he would take me to France and look out for me while I needed help. He was as good as his word. We landed at Havre and from there came to Paris, as the captain said I would be much more apt to procure employment in the capital. I learned to make artificial flowers, and after a time was enabled to support myself. Ten years ago I landed in France, and since then I have lived in obscurity, believing that I was all alone in the world without kindred."

"Really a very romantic story," remarked the lawyer—"a most remarkable escape. Do you remember the name of the captain and the ship?"

"Oh, yes; both are imprinted on a heart which has never ceased to be grateful for the service so kindly rendered. The ship was named the *Le Prophete*—the captain, Rodolphe Nigaud."

"And do you suppose that you could find Monsieur Nigaud, if his evidence in regard to this matter was required?"

"I think so, but I am not sure," she replied. "He is quite an old man now, and some five years ago quitted the sea and retired to a small farm which he had purchased near his native place, St. Malo."

"Yes, yes, I know the town; it has an old and honorable history."

"Since that time I have not seen Captain Rodolphe, nor heard from him, and he may be dead for all I know."

"Oh, no, no; not the slightest danger of that, my dear mademoiselle. These old sea-captains get so well preserved by the salt of the ocean, through which their good ships plow, that they last a third as long again as we landmen. If the captain was alive five years ago, the chances are great that he still lives among the rocks of St. Malo now; therefore his testimony can be easily procured in regard to your rescue. And now, my dear young lady, will you allow me to ask you a most important question?"

"Certainly, monsieur."

"As you were brought up in the belief that you were the child of the French trader, Auguste Bienville, how comes it now that you believe you are not, and that you are the lost heir to the Morel line?"

"The question is easily answered, monsieur, and the story is as strange and improbable as the record of my shipwreck and miraculous escape."

"Proceed."

"I live in a modest little room in the Latin Quarter, and do my work there, going to the manufactory only to carry my completed work home, and to procure fresh materials to make up. Three days ago, while on my way home from the warehouse, I encountered a woman who appeared to watch me closely. Finally, after following me for a while, she came up and spoke to me, apologizing for the liberty by saying that I reminded her very much of a young girl whom she once knew. She wished to know if I would be kind enough to grant her the favor of a private interview, as she had something very important to say to me. My curiosity was excited, and I made an appointment for last evening. She came promptly, and very soon I discovered that she had considerable knowledge of my history; that is, she knew my name was Camille Bienville, and that I was an orphan, entirely without kindred. I am not naturally a talker, although a woman, and I had never revealed to any one the strange story of my early life. After beating about the bush for some time, she came to the object for which she had sought me. She was acting as the agent of some scheming men who preferred at present to remain in the background. In brief, she told me the story of the lost heir of Morel, and how a fortune of fifty millions of francs waited for her. She explained that the American, who had come to France expressly to find the heiress, and who was the only one in the world who could surely tell the true heiress from a false one, had been mysteriously murdered, and she proposed that I should place myself in the hands of the men upon whose behalf she had come, and they would bring me forward as the heir; they were skillful and unscrupulous men and could easily manufacture the proofs that I was Tampa Morel, now that the American was out of the way. The woman's story supplied the missing links in my life, and cleared up the darkness which enveloped the past. I kept my own counsel, for I was satisfied that by one of those strange accidents which sometimes happen in this world, I had been chosen by the conspirators to play the part of myself! I was

convinced that I was Tampa Morel. You, monsieur, was spoken of by the woman as being the lawyer who had undertaken the management of the affair for the American, and so, pretending to be afraid of the risk, I declined to have anything to do with the plot, determined to seek you and tell you of my suspicions at the earliest opportunity."

Rinot was instantly impressed by the strength of the girl's statement and felt tolerably sure that here indeed was the heir for whom so great a search had been made. The mysterious murder of the American, too, was partially explained. He had a suspicion that the shrewd rascals who were in quest of a false heir, by means of whom they hoped to capture the fifty millions of francs, had planned the death of the American as the first step in the game. By the trapping of the general they hoped to get possession of the private papers which he had brought with him from America and which would prove the identity of the heir when the heir was found. But now, it was clear to the mind of the lawyer that the schemers had not succeeded in getting hold of the papers, or else, when they had pitched upon the girl they would have been instantly aware that she was the true one.

But, where were these precious papers? Aha! that was the rub!

"Your story, to my mind, is pretty conclusive that you are Tampa Morel, but the law requires more," Rinot remarked. "General Calhoun had papers which he said would clearly prove the identity of the girl the moment she was found, and he made mention of some peculiar birthmarks which the heir had upon her person."

"I am marked in a strange manner," announced the girl, a charming blush rising upon her cheeks.

"Yes, but I don't know what the right marks are; I have written, however, to America, to the general's lawyers, whose names he fortunately happened to mention, and perhaps the evidence can be procured. You see, there is a great gap in your story caused by the shipwreck. If any of the crew now had escaped to testify in regard to your being on the vessel with Bienville."

"Ah, there was a better witness there than any of the sailors!" cried the girl, eagerly.

"An Indian chief of the Seminole tribe, and now with the flood of light which has been poured upon the past, I feel sure that the chief who was in company with the French trader was being brought to France as a witness to prove my identity with the child of the count stolen by the savages. Possibly the Indian was one of the men who did the deed."

"No doubt of it, and by a miracle similar to one by which you were saved, he might also have escaped. I'll take measures to find him at once if he is on the earth, no matter where. And now, mademoiselle, will you place yourself entirely in my hands?"

"Entirely," replied the girl, with perfect trust.

"Then, mademoiselle, you shall have your fifty millions if human wits can gain them!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

AGAIN BAFFLED.

MONSIEUR PELOTON and the madame had quite a long and earnest discussion in regard to the new patient, a day or two after the serious affray in which the new-comer had played so prominent a part.

The madame had become alarmed. As became a true daughter of Gaul she mortally detested all Englishmen, and now that this one had become domiciled in her house, after the exhibition he had made of himself, she did not believe that anything but evil would come from him.

Peloton, more dull of soul than his better-half, and therefore not so liable to yield to apprehension, laughed at her fears.

"He pays well, my duck!" he exclaimed; "and even if he does give us a little more trouble than the ordinary run of customers, what of it?"

The madame shook her head; like most of her sex argument was wasted upon her. She felt sure that the Englishman would bring them no good, but on the contrary much harm.

"The fiend take the money!" she cried. "Of what use will the money be if the brute murders all of us in his fits?"

"For a month, anyway, he will not trouble us," the other assured. "And now that we know what he is, why, we will be on the lookout for him. His wound is an ugly one, and when he gets on his feet again he will be weak; now on the first sign of temper I have made up my mind to take it out of him. I will soon show him who is master here; he will be obedient or we will beat him like a dog; one or two sound drubbings will take the nonsense out of him," and the scoundrel wagged his head in a significant manner.

The madame looked at him with admiration upon her countenance.

"Ah, you are a king, my jewel!" she exclaimed. "It is no wonder you have prospered."

This conversation took place at night; the pair were seated in the reception-room of the Retreat; and at this point one of the attendants interrupted the interview with the information that a gentleman desired speech with Monsieur Peloton.

The lady once more discreetly retired, and the servant admitted the person.

Peloton sprung to his feet in amazement when he saw that it was the young Englishman who had placed the refractory patient in the institution.

"Aha, monsieur, you are welcome! From the bottom of my soul am I glad to see you; and this madman of yours, ha! you are come to take him away? It is good! I am glad of it! Never in all my life have I had so much trouble. Wait for a moment! I will fetch you the balance of your money, although it is against the rule of my establishment to return any fees once paid, but in this case I will make an exception in your favor if you will only take your English devil away!"

The visitor laughed in the face of the excited and gesticulating Frenchman.

"You return money?" he cried. "Well, then, the heavens must be ready to fall!"

Peloton was so astonished at the stranger's accurate knowledge that he forgot his excitement and stared open-mouthed at him. In truth, he had not the remotest idea of returning a sou; on the contrary, he had planned to extort an additional fee on account of the trouble he had had with the new patient.

"Oh, no, my dear fellow, you must not try to play that game upon me, because it will not work. I know you altogether too well. You have had trouble, I suppose, but you must take into consideration that the price I paid was large enough to cover it."

"No, no!" Peloton returned, in haste, "a thousand times no! This man is a demon, milord, a perfect devil!" and then he proceeded to give an account, considerably exaggerated, of the struggle the patient had made and the desperate means which had been adopted to subdue him.

The young man listened as calmly as though he was not in the least interested in the affair, and Peloton was puzzled.

"Well, Monsieur Peloton, if the man is as badly wounded as you state, it is quite plain that he will not be apt to give you much trouble for some time, so for a month at least he may as well remain here."

"Ah, monsieur, but do you not think I ought to have something extra for all this trouble? Consider the care the wounded man must have."

"Make your mind easy about that; you have not found me hard at a bargain in the past and I will be as liberal in the future."

"Ah, milord, you Englishmen have noble hearts!" cried the master of the Retreat, with a low bow.

"Perhaps I had better see him; then I shall be able to judge of his condition," the other suggested.

Peloton shook his head.

"What is the matter—why do you object?"

"Do you think it is wise in his present state?"

"What reason is there why I should not see him?"

"He is in a fever, monsieur, and any agitation might be dangerous."

"Do not be alarmed on that score; I shall not agitate him."

Peloton expressed considerable doubt about this, and the young man explained that his person was unknown to the patient, which fact astonished the Frenchman still more.

"Just as you say, monsieur," he remarked.

"Have the kindness to follow me."

The visitor was conducted to the apartment where the patient had been placed, and on the way thither he propounded a single question:

"Did you call in a doctor?"

"Oh no," replied Peloton, with a cunning leer. "You must understand, monsieur, that in such an establishment as this we do not care to have any outsiders poking about. Besides, I am something of a surgeon, myself, and in this case quite expert enough to do all that was necessary."

"Good! I am the doctor, then, to call upon him."

The other nodded; the idea struck him favorably.

In a shabbily-furnished sleeping chamber the visitor found the old man, reposing on a small iron bedstead, and in utter darkness.

Peloton, with a grin to the patient, by means of which he intended to express his friendly feelings, set the candle he carried upon the little table by the head of the bed and then withdrew.

The wounded man fixed his eyes wistfully upon his visitor as the young man took possession of the only chair in the room and drawing it to the bedside sat down.

"My dear sir, I have been called upon to examine your wound," he said, with a very broad English accent.

The old man sat bolt upright in the bed, trembling with excitement.

"You speak English—you are an Englishman and I am saved, thank God!" he cried.

"Gently, my dear sir! Do not agitate yourself," the other continued.

"You will take me away from here—from this hell of torture! This is a lunatic asylum, is it not?"

"You really must not give way to this excitement or I shall be obliged to retire. I have come to examine your wound."

"Oh, that is all right; it don't amount to anything—an ugly scratch, but that is all. These infernal frog-eaters attended to it. I have had considerable experience in such matters and I know what I am talking about. All that worries me is staying here, and if you are a man you will get me out."

The other shook his head.

"I am almost a stranger in this country and if you are at all acquainted with the laws—"

"Laws!" cried the sick man, vehemently, "what have laws to do with my detention here? I have been kidnapped, and the law will rescue me from this den and punish these wretches if I can only get my complaint before the proper authorities," and at this point the speaker fancied that he detected an incredulous look stealing over the face of the other. "But of course you too believe that I am crazy and that all this talk is but the ravings of a madman. It is only natural; I have read of such things a hundred times, but I never dreamed it would come home to me so forcibly. If these scoundrels had not robbed me of my private papers I could easily convince you, though, that I am anything but mad. I understand it all! I am the victim of a deep-laid plot. It is necessary to silence me, and by shutting me up here I am silenced, although why these desperate men did not kill me outright is a mystery, because from this place I shall surely escape some day, and then I will have ample satisfaction for this terrible outrage!"

"But these papers that you speak of—who do you suppose has them—the keeper of this institution?"

"Oh no; the cunning brain that planned this fiendish scheme, and has succeeded in carrying it out so well, would never have trusted anything of importance to that big brute. He is fit to act as my jailer—fit to keep me here until the purpose, to further which I am shut up here, is accomplished, but beyond that I feel sure he is as ignorant of the plans and plots of this master fiend as I am."

"Who has the papers, then?"

"The cunning devil who entrapped me so cleverly, and who has apparently blotted me out of the world. To secure those documents—which, beyond a doubt, in some ingenious manner it was discovered I carried upon my person, I was ensnared."

"But have you no copies elsewhere?"

"None, but it doesn't matter; all I want now is to get out of this."

"Hush! I hear footsteps in the hall. I will see you again, and in the mean time be patient, and I will do all I can for you," and the speaker rose to his feet and listened intently for a moment. "You understand that I must keep my suspicions to myself, for if the superintendent suspected that I believed there was anything wrong he would quickly take measures to make you appear insane even if you were not so."

"Yes, yes; I have read of such things, but I thought in my superior wisdom that it was all a pack of lies, coined out of the writer's brain, and that it was not possible for any such thing to occur in this life; but truth is stranger than fiction, and the mind of man cannot conceive anything stranger than the acts which the son of man wills."

"Be patient and all will be well. I shall be obliged to move slowly in this matter, for this is a country of strange laws; it may be a week or two before I can find grounds whereupon to act. Adieu!" and then he passed out into the hall, taking the candle with him, and there in the solitude he clinched his hands and cried:

"Where are those papers? What demon plucked them from my grasp?"

CHAPTER XXXVI.

"MANY A SLIP 'TWIXT CUP AND LIP."

"At last, at last!" the Detective Queen cried, in wild exultation, as she possessed herself of the documents upon the table.

She had recognized the pocket-book, for it was a peculiar one, of a kind not commonly in use in France; she felt perfectly sure that the papers were those of which she had been in search—the valuable documents that were to play a most important part in swaying the destinies of fifty millions of francs.

She placed the lantern upon the table, and by its light proceeded to examine the prize.

As anticipated they were the papers sought—the documents brought across the sea by the ill-fated American, who had disappeared in so mysterious a manner.

"Aha! I shall triumph!" she exclaimed, after she had finished her inspection, and began to carefully fold them up and stow them away in the pocket-book. "And now the question

arises, how came these articles here? Who is it that has been playing hide-and-seek in the Hotel Morel? What mortal can possibly have a knowledge of these secret ways in this old house, and what object has that person to possess himself of these documents and to conceal them here? Who is it that has entered this struggle in this manner and under which banner does he range himself? for it is a man, of course; no woman could have accomplished it. And then, the papers, which were in the American's possession—how were they obtained?"

"Oh, *mon Dieu!*" she cried, after a moment's pause, pressing her hands tightly to her temples, "I have made my head ache with all these questions, and why should I worry my brains with them? What care I to guess the puzzle? The documents are mine at last, and that is one most important point gained. No matter who stole them from the American—no matter why they were stolen or brought here, they are in my possession, and if I do not make a good use of them, then La Marmoset is not as wise as she is believed to be. But this unknown, who fights in the dark! I do not like the idea, and I will not rest satisfied until I discover who it is, and for whom he is acting," and there was a look of almost fierce determination upon her features.

As she reached forward to take up the bull's-eye there was a peculiar noise—a whirr in the air. The lantern was struck violently from the table to the floor and extinguished, thus plunging the room into total darkness.

La Marmoset drew a long breath; she knew what had occurred; some one had noiselessly entered the vault and with a well-directed missile had hurled the lantern from the table.

The mysterious unknown who had contrived to possess himself of the important papers carried by the American—who had frightened the Countess Morel by his stealthy steps across her apartment at the dead hour of the night on his way to the vault by the secret passage, was at hand, and it was plain from his first movement that he had come to do battle for the documents which he had so carefully hidden away.

La Marmoset's breath came thick and hard, for she believed she was on the eve of a desperate struggle, but not in the least did she shrink from the encounter, rendered still more horrible by the dense gloom that enshrouded the vault.

In an instant she thrust the pocket-book containing the papers into the bosom of her blouse, and then drew the trusty revolver, her constant companion.

The click of the lock, as she brought the hammer up to full cock, resounded clearly through the vault, and the spy listened anxiously, expecting a similar sound to come from the darkness before her. She had faced about immediately after the lantern had fallen, understanding that the missile must have come from the rear.

But no answering click of pistol-hammer reached her ears; all that she could distinguish—and her ears were as sharp as the animal whose name she bore—was a slight sound like suppressed breathing.

She leveled her revolver straight before her and fired.

It was a random shot of course, and she had little hope that the bullet would reach the intruder, but she relied upon the flash of the powder to light up the apartment so that she would be able to see where the unknown was and what he was like.

For a moment the powder flash did illuminate the gloom, but La Marmoset failed to accomplish her object; nothing but the bare stone walls met her eyes!

A peculiar sort of dread began to creep over her; for the first time in her life she had encountered an antagonist who caused her to know the meaning of the word *fear*.

She comprehended fully the movement which had been made. After extinguishing the lantern, the unseen had changed his position, and, taking advantage of the darkness, had glided around to her rear.

Quickly recocking the pistol the Queen wheeled, and, as she did so, she was suddenly seized by the throat by fingers so hard and bony that they seemed like steel.

Although taken at a most decided disadvantage, she grappled with the assailant. But, vain was the struggle; the gripe around her throat tightened; her head began to swim, and her senses to desert her.

In fearful agony she strove to break the clutch that was choking the life out of her. Her limbs trembled; she reeled—gasp—beat the air wildly for a moment with her hands; then her head seemed on fire; her senses deserted her and she fell, writhing in agony, to the floor.

The mysterious unknown had triumphed, and, despite her skill and courage, La Marmoset, the Detective Queen, was beaten at last.

The last thing she remembered was the desperate attempt she made to break the gripe upon her throat; then came a blank—a blank that was so near death that it might have been death itself, but for the wonderful endurance with which the woman was gifted.

How long she remained insensible she knew

not, but when she recovered she was in utter darkness, and by the cold stones upon which she lay, surmised that she was still in the vault.

Being provided with an ample store of matches she relit the lantern, the glass alone of which had suffered, and examined the place.

Not the slightest trace could she find of the intruder, but the pocket-book, with the papers, had been taken from her bosom. This fact, together with the broken lantern, was ample proof that all was real that had occurred.

The Queen was baffled, hot as the scent had been.

CHAPTER XXXVII. A BOLD SCHEME.

AGAIN we must ask the reader to accompany us to the unsavory drinking-shop without the walls of Paris—the Inn of the Red Goat, which the first chapter of our tale introduced.

It is night; the host, Master Jean Facade—who figured in the secret police records under the name of Black Jean, the Stabber—sits at the door leading from the wine-shop into the little garden in the rear, smoking the short pipe, his constant companion, and watching, with a contemptuous grin upon his stern and ugly face, a group of noisy drinkers—workmen of the lowest class, apparently, to judge from their dress—clustered around a table, quaffing the cheapest and poorest wine that Master Jean's cellar afforded, and talking treason enough to upset a dozen dynasties.

With the exception of this noisy group, no other customers were in the place.

Black Jean's contempt for the blatant declaimers, who were so loud-mouthed in regard to the rights and wrongs of the people, found vent at last, in the muttered sentence:

"Ah, you may bark, but there isn't a bite in a brigade of such hounds! If there was, men like myself wouldn't be keeping dirty wine-shops, but be at the guillotine, cutting off the heads of the aristocrats, as in the good old days when the Three ruled in France, and before our upstart Napoleon widened the avenues so as to be able to mass his artillery and sweep the streets with his guns."

A hang-dog looking fellow lounging in through the gate, as though uncertain in regard to his welcome, interrupted the innkeeper's reflections.

Facade recognized him at once, and made the sign for advance, which the other did, after taking a good look at the drinkers clustered around the table.

"Don't be afraid," the host said, as the other came up and sat down on the stool which Jean pushed forward for his accommodation; "those louts, yonder, are harmless. I know them all, with the exception of the little stout fellow; he is a new-comer, and, as far as I can see, he seems to be the biggest jack of the lot."

"A man needs to keep his wits about him, for some of these police spies are learning their trade only too well."

"No danger in my place," Jean reassured; "I keep too close a watch upon all strangers, and I fancy I can detect a spy the moment he puts his nose inside my walls. Only one of the whole gang I fear, and that is the woman, La Marmoset, and she, I believe, is a very imp of the devil instead of a human being."

"I have no cause to apprehend danger from her for she and I are old acquaintances."

"That's lucky for you," the other growled. "Nothing like having a friend at court, and when you have a friend best to have a good one. They say La Marmoset has more influence with that donkey of a minister of police than all the rest of the spies put together. He calls her his Queen of Detectives."

"I should not wonder, for she is above all the rest. But now to business: Jean, my friend, that little scheme which you proposed will not work."

"The Morel affair?"

"Yes."

"I know it," growled the other, very ill-naturedly; "Rinot's clerk was here just after nightfall and announced that all the fat is in the fire."

"Yes, the true heir has turned up, and the lawyer has got hold of her, so away goes all chance of our bagging any of that fifty millions. It is a great pity, too, for with such a stake as that to play for, a man could afford to spend two-thirds of it on the struggle and then would be rich with the remainder."

"Ten thousand devils! it's a shame!" cried Jean, angrily, yet careful to keep his voice down. "And, after you had all your trouble, too."

The other looked at the speaker as if he did not exactly understand.

"You know what I mean—the American."

"The American! Well, what of him?"

"It was a neat job, and does you great credit. Old Preval is wild after the Italians, always barking on the wrong scent like an old dog whose nose is gone."

"Oh, I see what you mean; but, do you lay the American's death at my door, Jean?"

"Certainly! I knew you had a finger in the pie when I read how neatly the affair was worked. I don't want to flatter you, com-

rade, but I don't believe there are five men in all France who could have done the trick so neatly."

"It was none of my doing; in fact, I had a suspicion that you arranged the matter!"

Jean shook his head.

"No, none of my work; but you surprise me when you say you hadn't anything to do with it. Who worked it, then?"

"Some new hand, I think, who believed the American carried a fortune in his pockets, as some of them do. But now, my brave Jean, I am after other game since this fifty million affair has vanished into thin air. It is not big game, but in this world a man cannot always have cheese with his bread."

"I'm with you unless the risk is too great and the pay too small."

"Listen and judge: You know the Morels as I do, and have no reason to love them."

"Ay, that is truth! Many a time when I was a boy have I felt the old count's horse-whip sting my back when he caught me lurking in his woods."

"I too have some remembrances of that kind which are not particularly pleasant. I swore once I would kill the count, but somehow I never got the chance, and then at last the red savages saved me the trouble and quitted my debt when they settled their own. Now, there is a gentleman in Paris whom I have served on several occasions, and this nobleman—he is a Russian prince, by the way—"

"A Russian prince! By my head, my friend, you have illustrious acquaintances."

"Princes are as common in Russia as chevaliers in France, and generally count for no more," replied the other, with a sneer.

"Well, this gentleman is deeply enamored of the charming Countess De Morel; but, with the obstinacy of her race, mademoiselle declines the suit of a Russian prince to smile upon a beggarly American doctor."

"Humph! These Americans are rare devils among the women. They are rich, too; I have heard it said that they dig gold out of the earth over there as we do clay here."

"My friend, the prince, does not relish this treatment, and he has made up his mind that, since the countess cannot be won by fair means, foul must answer."

"Good! I like your Russian!" exclaimed Jean. "I like a lad of spirit who won't be satisfied with *no*! from the lips of the woman he fancies. Bah! what do the jades know about it! Not one woman in a thousand in this world ever knows her own mind."

"Although the prince was first attracted to the countess by the report that she was the heiress to this fifty millions of francs, the other girl being missing, yet now that the appearance of the true heir knocks that in the head, he has become so enamored of the lady, and so nettled by her preference for the American, that he has determined to possess her no matter how great the risk or the cost."

"Good! I like that! I like to see these proud dames humbled!"

"The prince has arranged a plan by means of which the countess will be induced to fly with him, and after that event takes place, for her own sake the haughty Marie Antoinette will be forced to tread in the path which his scheme first forces her feet to enter."

"Capital! It is a superb idea!"

"And just such a man as yourself is needed to assist in the execution."

"You can rely upon me, as I said before, provided the pay is good and the risk is small."

"I promise that in advance; and now this is the scheme," and leaning over he whispered the details into the ear of the host.

"To-morrow night?"

"Yes; I have no time to lose, as La Marmoset has warned me as a friend that the net is closing around me, so I must get out while I can. Be at the meeting-place prompt," he added, rising.

"I will not fail."

"Adieu!" and the other quitted the place.

There was a howl of laughter from the group at the table. The little stout man, who had drank to excess, had suddenly been taken ill, and amid the jeers of the rest, staggered out of the garden.

"There's a nice beast for you!" Jean growled. "To think of a little sour wine making a man as sick as a dying dog!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII. THE APPOINTMENT.

THE Countess of Morel and Madame de Mois-sac sat in the drawing-room of the Hotel Morel. It was about eight o'clock in the evening, and the two were busily engaged in discussing the strange events which had trodden upon each other's heels so closely within the last few weeks, but principally their conversation was of the American, the odd quest which had brought him to Paris, and the sudden and unaccountable end to which he had come.

"Heaven works in wondrous ways, my child," the old lady remarked, "and we poor mortals are not gifted with the power of seeing into the future. Perhaps it is as well for us that we are not favored in that respect; but all this

that has come to pass within the last few days is more like a romance than reality. The appearance of this American gentleman, and his strange story of the life and death of the count whose fate for so many years has been shrouded in obscurity, and whom, long ago, we mourned as dead; then the story of his marriage in the far-off American land and the remarkable career of his only child, torn from her home by the savages, rescued from them by the kind-hearted Frenchman, who doubtless had no idea that he was snatching from a fate worse than death the daughter of a countryman."

"Rescued from the wilderness only to disappear, leaving no trace behind her, in this great city, the very heart of civilization," observed the young girl, thoughtfully.

"Yes, although the unavailing search for her is to be regretted, yet to you some compensation is afforded for the danger which her presence would have caused you. You are now the heir to the fifty millions of francs. Think of it, my child; I doubt if there is a woman in France who can boast of such an inheritance."

"It gives me no pleasure, madame," the girl replied, rising and uneasily pacing up and down the apartment. "No, madame, I assure you I do not crave the fortune which belongs to this poor child, whose career has been so strange, and whose fate is even now shrouded in the most complete mystery. But, madame, in my own mind I do not feel so sure that she is dead. Paris is a great city, and I have often heard my teachers say that for a place to hide there is no spot in the wide world that can compare with it."

"By the way, Marie, how is the prince?" asked the old lady, a sudden thought occurring to her. "Have you heard in regard to his condition to-day?"

"Yes, I had Jules make inquiry, and he returned with the information that he was in a very dangerous condition indeed, and was not expected to recover."

"What an unfortunate thing! How sad that the dreadful duel took place!"

"Oh, I am sure, madame, it was one of those unfortunate events that cannot be avoided. It was fated to happen, and although, if the prince should die, I would greatly deplore his death, yet in my heart I could not find it possible to blame Monsieur Dunbar, for, from what I have seen, I am sure the American did all a true gentleman should do to escape being drawn into a quarrel."

"If the prince does die, as now seems likely, I am afraid the authorities will endeavor to arrest Monsieur Dunbar, if they can possibly secure him, judging from what the newspapers say. At any rate, I hope he will not venture back to France until the prince recovers from his present dangerous condition."

"Do not be alarmed in regard to that, madame," Marie hastened to exclaim. "Monsieur, although young in years, is both wise and prudent, and I am sure he will not do anything to jeopardize his safety. He has good friends here in Paris, who will be careful to warn him of everything that occurs."

The entrance of the waiting-maid, Nichette, interrupted the conversation.

"Can I speak a few words with you, mademoiselle, if you please?" she asked, and as the girl spoke, the countess noticed that she looked pale and seemed embarrassed.

Madame embraced the opportunity to retire, explaining that she had some letters to write.

After the old lady had departed the countess resumed her seat and the girl approached, trembling with nervous excitement.

"Why, what is the matter, Nichette? What ails you that you look and act so strangely?" the countess asked, in wonder.

"Oh, mademoiselle!" wringing her hands, "is it true what Jules tells me—is his Highness, the prince, likely to die?"

"So it is reported," replied Marie, utterly unable to understand what the affair had to do with the maid.

"And if the police catch Monsieur Dunbar he will be put in prison and hanged—so Jules says!"

"There is very little danger of any such thing occurring," the young lady declared. "Monsieur Dunbar is not on French soil, nor is he likely to be until the Russian is out of danger."

"Ah, but he is, mademoiselle! Monsieur Dunbar is now in Paris, having secretly returned!"

The countess was on her feet in an instant.

"Oh, how horribly imprudent!" she exclaimed, her face plainly showing how deeply she was excited by the intelligence which had so taken her by surprise.

"Yes, and when I encountered his man at the garden gate you might have knocked me down with a feather!"

"But are you sure that it is his man? I do not believe I should be able to recognize him."

"Oh, yes, mademoiselle, I am very well acquainted with him."

"Does he bring a message to me?" questioned the young woman, forgetting her maidenly reserve in her eagerness.

"Yes, mademoiselle, and he begged me to deliver it to you secretly, for he said that it might

cost his master his life, and most surely would jeopardize his liberty if Monsieur Dunbar were found lurking in Paris, now that the prince's illness has assumed a dangerous turn."

"Where is he?" the countess demanded, all prudence disappearing in her anxiety.

"Waiting at the garden gate, mademoiselle; he has disguised himself so that I hardly knew him at first myself."

"I will go to him instantly; but is there not danger of my being observed?" she asked, pausing upon the threshold.

"No, mademoiselle; the way is clear. I looked out for that. You can see him, if you wish, without any one being the wiser."

"I will go, then, and you keep watch so that none of the servants will surprise me," and with eager haste the countess hurried to the garden gate, where a stalwart man, muffled up in a great coat, with a hat pulled down over his eyes, so that he looked like a workman bent on a journey, leaned against the gate-post.

When the countess approached he pulled off his hat respectfully, and saying, "Madame Countess, permit me," presented her with a letter.

The countess hurried to the gaslight which projected from over the door leading from the hotel into the garden, and, tearing open the note, eagerly devoured the contents. She recognized the hand only too well, for even now within her bosom, next to her heart, she carried a brief, business-like note which she had once received from the American in regard to a box at the opera which she had commissioned him to procure for her.

The note was short, evidently written in a hurry, and read as follows:

"MADAME LA COMTESSE:

"Will you kindly grant me the favor of a farewell interview? I have been so hunted and worried by the police that as the only escape from them I have doubled back to Paris, trusting by so bold a game to throw the spies off my track until I can secure a safe hiding-place. Moments are precious; I would like to say a few farewell words to you upon a most important subject before I am again forced into exile, as it may be weeks, perhaps months, before I will have another opportunity. I have carefully arranged everything, so there is not the slightest danger of your actions being known. The bearer of this, a trusty fellow, whose discretion can be relied upon, will have a carriage in waiting. Twenty minutes' drive will bring you to my place of concealment, and you can return in a like manner. I beseech you, for the sake of our old friendship, to grant me this favor."

And then, in the bold handwriting of the young American came the well-known name, so precious to the young girl, of Franklin Dunbar.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE INTERVIEW.

FOR a girl possessed of the impulsive nature of the countess to think was to act; and then, too, the passion which dwelt in her heart for the young American was one of wonderful power, and her desire to look once again upon the face of her lover would have made her take a far more desperate step than the one proposed.

After hastily arraying herself in plain, dark attire, with a heavy veil over her face, and bidding the maid keep her absence a secret, she accompanied the messenger.

A close carriage was in waiting; the countess entered it and was driven rapidly away.

Reclining against the soft cushions the young girl gave herself up to pleasant meditations in regard to the coming interview.

The drive was quite a long one, but the countess took no heed of the flight of time, so occupied was she in thought.

At last the vehicle halted; the driver opened the door and assisted the countess to descend.

In the gloom of the night the young girl looked around her. It was a lonely spot, evidently without the walls of the city, for there were few houses visible. A better hiding-place for a man who was not anxious to cultivate the acquaintance of the police could not have been easily found.

The carriage had stopped before a small, two-storied country house, with a neglected garden in front. Not a ray of light was visible in any of the windows of this cottage—nothing to indicate that it was inhabited.

"Straight forward through the garden, mademoiselle, and up one flight of stairs to the back room; the door is at the head of the stairs. You can easily find your way; there is a light in the entry. You must excuse me from going with you, as I must remain here to watch the carriage and avert suspicion if any meddling police spy should chance to come along," explained the servant.

Thus clearly directed, the countess proceeded without hesitation.

She easily found the door, and opening it, entered the apartment beyond, and there she discovered, to her horror, that she was face to face—not with the young American, but with the Russian prince!

Immediately the truth flashed upon her, she had been cunningly entrapped.

She turned swiftly about as if with intent to

flee from the unwelcome sight, but the door was guarded by the smiling captain, who bowed in the most polite manner as he encountered the gaze of the deceived and trembling girl.

But only for a moment did she yield to the fear so natural to the situation; then all the pride of her race rose in her veins, and wheeling about she confronted the Russian with a scorn akin to that an old-time empress would have felt, menaced by a vassal.

"What is the meaning of this, sir?" she demanded.

"My dear Marie, you need not affect ignorance on account of the presence of our friend yonder. The captain knows all, and I have confided to his care the letter which you intrusted to me," replied the prince in a familiar manner, which fairly made the indignant girl shiver with rage.

"A letter intrusted by me to you, sir?" she exclaimed.

"Certainly! Why attempt to deny it?" the Russian asked, an expression of wonder upon his face.

"What is the meaning of this mockery?"

"Mockery? My dear Marie, what is the matter with you? Do you not comprehend that the captain is a sharer in our secret, and that you can speak as freely before him as though I alone were present?"

The deceived girl was in a maze. That she had been tricked was plain, but what was the meaning of these mysterious words?

"The countess is agitated, doubtless, by the novelty of the situation, and, possibly, for the moment, she has forgotten the arrangements to which she consented," interposed the captain in his oily way. "Such lapses of memory are not uncommon."

"A thousand pardons, my dear Marie, for my stupidity in not comprehending how the novelty of your situation might affect you!" the prince hastened to exclaim. "But, you have been so brave in this matter—have acted so courageously in daring the opinion of the world, that I gave you credit for possessing a greater heart than falls generally to the lot of woman-kind."

"Are you mad that you speak thus to me?" demanded the countess in anger. "You have surely lost your senses!"

"No, countess; it is you who are confused, or else you would not speak in this fashion to the man with whom you are about to elope, leaving home and friends behind."

"Fly—fly with you!" cried the girl, dazed by the words like one who had received a heavy blow.

"Oh, clearly, Marie, your wits are wandering. Why, in your own handwriting, and over your own signature, you have proclaimed the fact to all the world. The captain has the letter."

"A letter—my letter?" the bewildered girl exclaimed, hardly able to believe that she heard aright.

"Your letter! Read it aloud, captain, so that the memory of the countess may be refreshed."

Fauconnier produced the note, a delicate little epistle on perfumed paper, unfolded it, and began:

"MY DEAR MADAME DE MOISSAC:

"By the time this note reaches your hands I shall be well on my way to Russia with the Prince Peteroski. At last I have yielded to his urgent solicitation, and go with him to the palace that awaits me in that far-off clime. I know that this union is contrary to your wishes and also to the opinion of all the rest of my relatives, but I feel that in such a matter my heart ought to rule superior to all else. When next you hear from me I shall have the right to sign myself THE PRINCESS PETEROSKI."

The reading finished, the captain advanced and held the note so that the astounded girl could inspect the writing, but, at the same time was careful to guard it against destruction. Knowing the high temper of the lady, he was fearful lest in her indignation she might seize upon the self-accusing billet and rend it into a thousand pieces.

Letter for letter—word for word, the writing was an exact imitation of her hand, and if she had not been sure she had had *not* written it she most certainly would have owned the letter as her own.

Then to her mind came the thought of the note in the handwriting of the American and signed by his name which had so easily deceived her into her present position.

The cunning skill which had imitated Dunbar's handwriting so successfully, of course would not fail with her more simple hand.

A cry of indignation escaped her when she realized how completely she had been tricked, and how deep was the plot that had been formed to ensnare her.

"Everything has been arranged exactly as you desired—all the arrangements made in the most complete manner," the prince remarked, affecting not to perceive the angry agitation of the deceived woman. "The captain will deliver this note to Madame de Moissac in the morning, and then he will visit all the newspaper offices and retail to the hungry editors, as a choice bit of news, all the particulars of the elopement of a Russian prince and a Parisian countess, concealing the identity of the two beneath initials

—that transparent disguise through which every one sees. By to-morrow evening the affair will be the talk of the town."

"Oh, you vile coward!" flamed out the girl in a sudden outburst of rage, "and do you for one moment think that I will submit to this?"

"My dear Marie, it is too late for you to retreat now," the prince replied in the coolest possible way. "Already your reputation is compromised and the only cure for that is a marriage with me. Already it is whispered around your hotel among the servants that you have fled in my company; you know how such rumors spread—they fly with the speed of the lightning."

"But my return will give the lie to all such falsehoods!" asserted the countess.

"Ah, but you will not return; you will go on; the carriage waits without and even now we are losing time."

"Let me depart or I will scream for assistance."

"Oh, no, you will not."

But she proved that she would by screaming at the top of her lungs.

Although in a measure taken by surprise yet the conspirators were prepared for such an emergency.

The captain darted forward, and seizing the countess around the body, pinioned her arms, while the prince, hastily removing the stopper of a small vial applied the bottle to the nostrils of the unfortunate girl, compressing her mouth with his broad hand as he did so.

A few seconds and the countess was helpless.

CHAPTER XL.

ON THE RIVER.

WHEN the patient in Monsieur Peloton's Retreat, recovered sufficiently from his wound to permit him to use his limbs he was allowed the freedom of the garden.

His illness had made him very tractable, or perhaps philosophy had come to his aid, and he had reflected that the more violent he was and the more trouble he gave, the harsher would be his treatment.

The keeper of the Retreat and his assistants were not at all sorry when they discovered that their brawny patient was disposed to be reasonable. Their one tussle with him had been sufficient and none were anxious for a second trial.

The patient, still very weak from the effects of the wound, did not walk about much. At the bottom of the garden, in a little clump of trees, a rustic bench had been constructed and upon this rude seat he generally spent his time, gazing out wistfully upon the ever-moving Seine, watching the craft sailing up and down upon its bosom.

The patient was too feeble to make any attempt at escape, and so Monsieur Peloton did not think it worth while to watch him. It was a clear impossibility for him to scale the surrounding high stone walls. True he might make friends with some passing boatman, but to prevent this, a large sign had been erected which told the character of Monsieur Peloton's establishment and at the same time warned all strangers against landing.

The Seine was quite broad at this point and the channel making over to the opposite shore very few craft came within speaking distance.

One of the keepers usually lounged about the garden, but on the present occasion, the Englishman being the only one of the inmates at liberty, and all being aware that he could not speak a word of French, it was not thought necessary to watch him.

"Patience, patience," he muttered, glancing disconsolately out upon the river, and passing his hand over his smoothly-shaven head—the luxury of a hat being denied him; "this must come to an end sometime; it cannot last forever. I must play possum for the present, though—pretend to be perfectly satisfied until I get strength enough to get out of this horrible den. But, what is the meaning of it? Why have I been entrapped? What object is to be gained by this remarkable proceeding? I am utterly and completely in the dark," and the man shook his head, sorrowfully.

His gaze, roaming listlessly out on the river, fell upon a gayly-painted boat—a little pleasure craft, floating down the stream quite near to the shore and only about a hundred yards from the garden of the asylum.

At first glance this boat appeared to be empty, as if it had broken away from its moorings and floated on aimlessly.

The heart of the prisoner gave a great leap.

"Oh, if I could only succeed in getting hold of that boat!" he muttered; "but then, am I strong enough to row?"

He had caught sight of the blades of a pair of oars projecting over the stern.

The boat drifted nearer and nearer to the shore, and the heart of the prisoner beat faster and faster.

He looked around him; not a soul was in sight. In fact, a more favorable moment for an escape from Monsieur Peloton's Retreat could not be hoped for.

"By Heaven! I'll risk it, wate as I am!" he cried.

And then, to his surprise, the boat suddenly began to rock as though some one was moving within it; then the flutter of a woman's dress, and a young and beautiful girl, exquisitely arrayed in a neat charming boating costume, sat upright in the bottom of the craft and looked around her!

At the same moment the prisoner had risen to his feet, and being now able to look down into the boat, saw that the girl had been reclining upon some cushions comfortably arranged in the bottom, so that she could enjoy a day-dream as she floated down the stream.

"Oh! I am nearly ashore!" she exclaimed, in English.

Again the heart of the prisoner gave a great leap.

"Ah, do you speak English?" he cried, in the same language.

"Oh, yes, it is my native tongue," she replied, looking curiously at the questioner, and really in the rough, galley-slave-like dress which he wore, together with his bald head and unshaven face, he presented a strange and anything but an agreeable picture.

"Are you English then?" he asked.

"No, I am from Florida—an American."

"And so am I, and, at present, I am in a most distressing situation. I have been the victim of a terrible plot, and am now imprisoned here in a private lunatic asylum."

The girl opened her really magnificent eyes wide in wonder, and then looking up, caught sight of the sign which described the character of Monsieur Peloton's establishment.

"And you are not crazy?" she asked, a slight doubt perceptible in her tone.

"Not in the least. I am aware that my appearance is against me, but it is a part of the system of this horrible place to dress the unfortunate souls who are confined here in this outlandish garb. Then, too, I attempted to escape when I was first brought here, and was shot down with as little ceremony as though I had been a rabbit instead of a human being. My head was shaved and my mustache and imperial cut off, my beard allowed to grow, and now I have no doubt that I look like anything but myself, but I am not mad. Look at me carefully, young lady, and judge for yourself. Do you detect any traces of insanity about me?"

"I do not, but then I am not certain that I am capable of judging about such a thing."

"Oh, believe me, miss, it is the truth!" the patient exclaimed earnestly, "and you would be doing a most charitable act if you would only aid me to escape."

"But, all this is so strange," the girl replied, evidently perplexed. "Why should any one wish to bring such a false accusation against you? What is the motive?"

"I am as much in the dark in regard to that as you are. I cannot imagine except that the mission which brings me to this land concerns some people who might be willing to silence me if such a thing could be done without their agency in the matter being suspected."

"It is a strange land, and the French are strange people," the girl responded. "I too have some romance in my life and even now I am concealing myself from the world by the advice of my lawyer, Monsieur Rinot—"

"What?" cried the other, greatly excited, "is it Jacques Rinot of whom you speak—the celebrated criminal advocate?"

"That is his name, I believe, and he is a renowned lawyer."

"He is my friend—the only friend I have in this country; and, miss, if you cannot aid me to escape—if you are not content to believe me when I say that I am not crazy, then in Heaven's name inform Monsieur Rinot that I am detained here, a helpless prisoner. He will come to my aid if you will speak but a single word—the name, Morel!"

"Morel!" exclaimed the girl amazed; "why, that is my name!"

"Your name?" and the patient trembled with excitement.

"Yes, Tampa Morel!"

"The daughter of John Morel, of Tampa Bay, Florida, and his wife Palmetto, formerly Palmetto Calhoun?"

"Yes, I am that child."

"The heiress of fifty millions of francs?"

"Yes, so Monsieur Rinot says, although he fears that it will be a difficult matter for me to prove that I am myself, for all the facts concerning my birth are shrouded in the most dense obscurity."

"I can render you valuable assistance; but, do not believe what I say; go to Monsieur Rinot and tell him what has happened to you to-day—relate how you found me here and leave him to act."

"Indeed I will not, for I believe your words, and I will aid you to escape from this horrid place if I can," declared the girl.

"And by so doing, miss, you will not only serve me but yourself also, as you will find. The moment is propitious; I am unwatched, and by the aid of your boat can easily escape."

"Come then in Heaven's name without delay!"

She assisted the prisoner to enter the frail

craft; then taking the oars, plied them with both skill and strength, while the fugitive stretched himself out in the bottom of the boat so as to evade discovery.

Half an hour afterward he was safe in Monsieur Rinot's country-house.

CHAPTER XLI.

A TERRIBLE TABLEAU.

THE plotters had provided for all possible contingencies, and so it happened that the bold attempt of the entrapped girl to escape from the snare into which she had been so easily decoyed came to naught.

The fumes of the powerful narcotic contained in the vial soon overcame all resistance, and she reclined, helpless, in the arms of the captain.

The two conveyed her to a lounge and then hastened to the window, opened it and looked out upon the silence of the night, fearing lest her one cry of alarm might have excited the attention of some chance passer-by.

Eagerly they listened, their faces white, their brows compressed and their hearts beating rapidly. Detection now signified the galleys and a long sojourn at Toulon. The risk they ran was a great one but the prize they hoped to gain was in their opinion worthy of it.

Not a sound seemed to be stirring on the night air.

"Hey, comrade, what think you? Is it all safe?" asked the captain.

"Oh, yes; do you not think so? This is a retired spot, not two people an hour pass along the road after eight o'clock."

"She screamed like a madwoman, though."

"Yes, but only once and unless the alarm was repeated would any one be apt to pay any particular attention to it? Would you, under like circumstances?"

"No, I do not think I would," the other admitted.

"Tranquilize yourself, then; there is not the slightest danger; but, let us get off as soon as possible. Is the carriage in readiness?"

"Yes; all ready."

"Assist me then with the girl."

"It is a bold game!" the captain remarked, as the two bent over the senseless form of the countess.

"And like all bold games it is a very simple one, and therefore likely to succeed. I shall fee the railway guard and secure a compartment to myself, explaining that the lady, my wife, is very ill; then on the journey I shall keep her under the influence of the narcotic all the time until we reach our destination where all arrangements have been made for us. You see, I compromise the girl so fearfully that there is no future for her apart from me."

"It is a magnificent plan and success seems certain," the captain confessed, as he assisted to lift the girl from the couch.

Straight toward the carriage, which was standing in front of the garden gate, the helpless countess was conveyed, but, as the two came through the gate, the sentinel who had been posted on the outside came up hurriedly.

"Ware hawk! There is danger!" he exclaimed.

"What is the matter?" questioned the prince.

"I caught sight of a dark figure skulking along on the opposite side of the road a moment ago."

The coachman jumped nimbly from the box of the carriage and came up to the group.

"We must take to our heels!" he whispered, "for I fancy the game is up. I can see men gliding about in the darkness on all sides."

The captain grew more nervous. It was the first time he had ever taken part in any such big game as the abduction of a countess, and now Toulon loomed up before him with terrible distinctness.

"Can we not escape through the garden?"

"Yes, yes, drop the girl and run!" the coachman urged.

"Oh, no! I have her, and by all the devils in the shades below I will hold on to her as long as I can!" the master-spirit of the enterprise replied.

"If you are taken it will be your own fault then," the coachman growled. "But, let us be off, for there is no time to lose."

And he was quite right, in fact there had been too much time wasted already as all of them soon discovered to their dismay.

They had not taken three steps when they discovered a cluster of dark figures in front of the house.

"*Mon Dieu!* gendarmes!" muttered the coachman, who was in the advance. "Back! and take to the open road; it is our only chance!"

But, no sooner had the party retraced their steps and passed through the gate than, as if by magic, a score of dark figures seemed to spring up out of the very earth. They were completely surrounded.

"Halt!" cried a stern voice.

Two of the party, the prince and the coachman, knew it only too well. It was the voice of Nicholas Morcel, Monsieur Preval's best man, chief of the secret service!

The game indeed was up!

The conspirators glared around them; not an avenue of escape seemed open.

"Surrender! You are surrounded," continued the thief-taker.

"To go back to the galleys!" cried the "prince," with sudden and ferocious rage.

"No, not while life remains!"

And dropping his fair and insensible burden ruthlessly to the ground he drew a revolver from his breast and discharged it at the head of the police spy leader.

Never in all his wild and desperate career had Morcel come nearer to death, for the bullet whizzed past within an inch of his head, cutting the tip of his right ear.

The gendarmes were unprepared for this bold movement, for the pistol-shot was followed by a desperate dash of the insaned man through the line that encompassed him, and for the moment it appeared as though the movement, desperate as it was, would be crowned with success; but Morcel, recovering from the amazement produced by the unexpected resistance, roared out to his men to fire upon the fugitive, and in obedience to the command a volley followed.

The darkness prevented any accurate aim from being taken, for the gendarmes had only the sound of the fleeing man's footsteps to guide them.

"Every bullet has its billet" is an old saying, and seemingly a true one, for, despite the darkness, one of the shots took effect; with a groan of despair the fugitive tumbled forward upon his knees and then rolled over on his side.

When the gendarmes reached him and flashed the light of a lantern upon his face he was dead!

A cry of amazement came from the lips of two of the bystanders as they looked upon the face of the stricken man. They were the Americans, Dunbar and Gordon.

"Is it possible?" Dunbar cried; "why, it is the Prince Peteroski!"

"Oh, yes, Vladimir Lavine, Prince Peteroski, a Russian nobleman, with a rent-roll of a hundred thousand francs a year," the chief of the gendarmes remarked. "The game was a bold one and he played it for all it was worth. I have been on his track for a couple of years, but I was not able to discover who he was until recently."

"He was an impostor then?"

"Yes, no more a Russian than I am, but one of the most accomplished Chevaliers d'Industrie that ever existed; a Frenchman by birth, of low extraction and born on the estates of this lady whom he tried to make his victim. His right name is Alexander Castiglione, and his first appearance in public life was when he was condemned to the galleys for ten years, when nothing more than a boy, for an outrageous assault on the Count of Morel. Curse the scoundrel!" continued Morcel, ruefully, feeling of the tip of his ear, "barked" by the bullet of the adventurer, "I believe the villain has marked me for life."

The presence of the two friends at this tragic scene is soon explained.

Upon their arrival at Paris their first call was upon the countess, and it so happened they arrived at the Palace Morel about half an hour after Mademoiselle Morel had left it upon her false quest.

At the hotel they encountered the old lawyer, Chopine, who had called to see the young lady upon important business, and who was terribly annoyed to find she was absent, and his suspicions were at once excited when he discovered that no one in the hotel knew anything about the countess's whereabouts.

While he was cross-examining the maid, who, he felt sure, knew more than she was willing to admit in regard to her mistress's absence, the Americans arrived.

Terrified by their appearance, (for to her guilty mind it seemed a sure indication that the plot had been discovered) she broke down, and though in reality knowing but little of the affair, yet she revealed enough to give the police a clew—the more so as the secret service force had been keeping a stringent watch upon the supposed Russian for some time. Little by little they had torn away the network of lies by which he had surrounded himself, and now this bold performance gave them a chance to close in upon him, and quickly they improved the opportunity.

In the person of the coachman, too, the police recognized an old acquaintance—Black Jean, "the Stabber," otherwise, Jean Facade, host of the Red Goat. The spy disguised as a workman, who had noticed the conversation between the disguised adventurer and Facade, had been the agent who had tracked the prince to his doom.

CHAPTER XLII.

STRONG EVIDENCE.

AS soon as he had his chain of evidence complete, so that he felt sure he could prove the identity of the girl, Tampa Morel, the rightful heiress of the fifty millions of francs, Monsieur Rinot boldly threw down the gage of battle.

In fact, so sure did he feel his case was a good one, that he took the trouble to call upon Chopine in person and tell him so:

"You informed me, Monsieur Chopine, that your client was not disposed to dispute the claims of this American heir, provided you were assured the claim was a valid one."

The old counselor replied that the Countess of Morel had informed him that, under no circumstances, would she oppose the intentions of her uncle, or throw any obstacles in the way of their execution, if she was satisfied that the claimant was indeed her cousin.

"Your client acts like an honest girl, although, as a lawyer, I am bound to think the course she has chosen is an imprudent one. The American estates, of course, never having been in her possession, she might be obliged to resign to this new-comer, but it would be some time, and require a long contest to dispossess her of the landed property in France which she has enjoyed so long unmolested."

"I am well aware of that, Monsieur Rinot, and, as the family lawyer, I felt it my duty to protest against the course which she has seen fit to choose, but she is headstrong and, in this matter, will have her own way."

"Well, what I have come to say is this: 'My client being perfectly confident of the justice of her claim, and quite certain that she has proof sufficient to win her case against any opposition, yet being touched by the generous conduct of the Countess of Morel, she desires to settle the matter in a friendly spirit and without resorting to the law-courts; so, as her advocate, I propose that there shall be a meeting of all the parties interested, at either your office or mine, at your option. She will present her claim, produce her witnesses, and you shall examine all you please. If you are convinced that everything is as represented, you will so inform the countess, and if she is disposed to admit the claims of Tampa Morel, and acknowledge her as the daughter of the deceased Count of Morel, and her cousin, my client is prepared to make a satisfactory arrangement—one that the countess can accept without feeling humiliated, and which she can tender freely and with a good grace.'"

Chopine shook his head.

"In the state of mind which the countess last exhibited I doubt very much whether she can be induced to accept anything. She is quite prepared to give up but not to take; but we will leave that matter for the future to decide, and in the mean while will accept your proposal in the same frank spirit in which it is tendered."

So the arrangement was made, and the office of Rinot fixed upon as the meeting-place.

Prompt to the appointed time Monsieur Chopine entered, escorting the Countess of Morel and Madame de Moissac.

The party were conducted by one of the clerks to the inner office, where sat the lawyer and a brilliantly beautiful girl whom Rinot introduced as the American heiress, Tampa Morel.

With looks full of curiosity the two girls surveyed each other, while Chopine indulged in a close scrutiny, as also did the old lady, and one and all were convinced upon the instant that the lady was what she claimed to be, for each fancied that in her face they could trace a strong likeness to the dead Count of Morel.

After the visitors were seated, Rinot spoke:

"This lady relies upon two witnesses only to prove that she is Tampa Morel, daughter of John de Moissac, Count of Morel, and his wife, whom he espoused in Florida, Palmetto Calhoun."

Then the lawyer proceeded to the door of a small inner room which led from the main apartment, and opening it, an Indian chief in full buckskin dress and war-paint came into the room!

"This is the Seminole chief who carried off the girl when she was captured by the savages at the massacre of Tampa Bay, when her father was killed."

All gazed with eager curiosity upon the aged Indian as he took the chair which the lawyer placed for him in the center of the floor.

The Indian was very old and apparently quite feeble—in fact, seemed but a mere wreck of a man. Quite a contrast he now presented to what he was when we first introduced him to our readers as the drum-beater, and the principal attraction, of the *Café Amerique*.

"Question him if you please, monsieur," Rinot said to Chopine. "He has been some time in the country and speaks French quite fluently."

"Do you know this lady?" the old lawyer asked, indicating the dark-hued beauty.

"Chaf-a-la-ya is the great chief of the Seminole nation," replied the savage, in feeble, broken tones. "Many moons ago he went on the war-path against the white-skins of Tampa Bay—he burnt their wigwams, killed their fighting-men and carried off their women and children, and the pale-faces he gave to his squaws and papposes to play with, and they were all put to death but one."

"And why was one saved?"

"She was the daughter of the great white chief Morel, the lord of Tampa Bay, and Chaf-a-la-ya saved her from the torture that she might grow up and be his squaw," and here he paused and cast such an insolent, leering look

at the American girl that it brought the blood up into her cheeks in a scarlet flame.

"And did you make her your wife?"

"No; when she was but a child had pale-faces decoyed the chief to the coast, made him mad with fire-water, and stole him from his home; but here, amid the big wigwams, moons and moons after, the chief meets the pale-face girl and he knows her again."

"And where is she?"

"There!" and the savage pointed with his trembling finger at the stranger, "the girl of Tampa Bay—the daughter of the great white chief Morel, whom Chaf-a-la-ya killed with his own hand in single fight."

The countess and the old lady shuddered at this horrible declaration, but the American girl sat like a statue, yet with a strange expression upon her face as she looked upon the savage.

"I am satisfied; no more questions to put to him," Chopine observed.

"I will introduce the other gentleman then," and Rinot conducted into the apartment a person whose appearance created quite a sensation—a tall, portly man who was evidently just recovered from a severe illness.

Chopine recognized him immediately. It was the American, General Calhoun, whose mysterious disappearance had puzzled all Paris, and at whose funeral the advocate had assisted when the remains discovered in the cellar had been reburied by the chief of police!

The American's story was soon told. He did not speak French but Rinot, familiar with English as his own mother tongue, translated the words of the stranger.

Calhoun told how he had been decoyed away by the masked man or woman—in his own mind he was not sure which—from the Grand Opera House on the night of the masquerade, how he had been induced to drink a glass of wine and then had immediately passed into an unconscious state, waking from it at last to find himself an inmate of the private asylum of Monsieur Peloton, and stripped of everything. Clothes, valuables, papers, all were gone; and with a natural fear, too, of the wiles of the cunning sons of Gaul, he always carried the important documents relative to the girl upon whose behalf he had crossed the ocean upon his person. But, as he took care to explain, that loss was not fatal to the cause he advocated, for the documents were not originals, only copies, and they could be easily replaced. The original papers were in America.

And, in regard to the present claimant, he testified in the strongest possible manner that it was his belief she was the daughter of John Morel, and he was satisfied he could prove it to be so to the satisfaction of any court in the world.

Chopine nodded his head; the case seemed to be clear enough.

The countess was prompt to act. Rising, she addressed the American girl:

"Cousin, I will not contest your claim, and believe me, no one regrets more than I the suffering through which you have passed."

Then she begged the other to come home with her, and the invitation was accepted.

The clouds which had obscured the fortunes of Tampa Morel seemed to be breaking away at last, and the fifty millions of francs were hers beyond a doubt.

CHAPTER XLIII.

A STRANGE DECLARATION.

WITH the girl went the two important witnesses without whose aid she would have been unable to demand her rights.

And that evening, in the Hotel Morel, she encountered the American, Franklin Dunbar. A girl of iron will and a face of marble, apparently, yet she could not help showing some signs of emotion when she looked upon his face, but as it happened no one noticed it.

After a brief call the young man departed and then Tampa—to give her the name she claimed—seized upon a favorable opportunity to speak to the countess in regard to him.

Marie was as honest as the sun, and disdained concealment, and therefore explained in the frankest manner the engagement which existed between herself and the young American, while Tampa listened with downcast eyes.

"And so you see," said the countess, in conclusion, with all a young maid's passionate ardor, "I can look with a smile upon the loss of a fortune, blessed with such a love."

For a few moments Tampa replied not, and when she raised her eyes they were wet with tears.

"I think not, dear girl, that I would rob you of a single franc, or do aught to cast a cloud upon your life, although, Heaven knows, I have suffered enough in this world to make me bitter to all mankind. But, enough of this. I have suffered and can suffer. Good-night!"

And abruptly she retired to her own apartment.

By a strange fancy the girl had asked to be permitted to occupy the chamber which her father, the count, had formerly used when in Paris.

This was the room which had been the count-

ess's bed-chamber, the apartment in which so many mysterious things had happened.

Alone in the solitude of the room, with the door securely locked, this strange, odd girl groaned aloud in the bitterness of her heart as she threw herself into a low chair.

"And this is the end!" she cried, in despair; "after all my struggle—after all my plotting the laurels of victory wither at my touch, or like Dead Sea apples turn to ashes in my mouth! Oh, I am sick at heart! Why not end this dreary farce here and now?"

Upon the table was a small decanter of wine. She filled a glass and taking a tiny vial from her pocket emptied the contents into the wine; an odor as of bitter almonds was apparent for a moment on the air.

"There—there is rest and peace! 'Tis but a single swallow and life's fitful dream is o'er," she murmured. "And, oh, how I have builded upon this triumph! His face has ever been before me. In my imagination I have looked forward to the time when, with this fortune in my possession, I should seek him out and say—'Do you not remember me? I am the poor girl, without friends, who lay sick and helpless in the hospital and you are the kind doctor who saved my life, and that life is now yours if you wish to claim it.' And now I find he is pledged to another. I have wrested from her the family estates, but she has possessed herself of the heart of the man whom I hoped to win. Whose is the victory then?"

A low chuckling laugh rung through the apartment; the girl sprung to her feet. Opposite to her, on the other side of the table, sat the Seminole chief—who had entered the apartment so noiselessly that his footsteps had not attracted the girl's attention, absorbed as she was in her gloomy thoughts.

And the door was locked, too! How had he gained entrance?

As her eyes wandered rapidly around the room the intruder understood the thought that was in her mind.

"What care I for doors in this house where I wander at will?" he said, arrogantly.

A strange expression came over the face of the girl as she surveyed the savage.

"And what know you of this house?"

"More of this house and more of you than you think," was the significant answer given in remarkably good French.

"You are not a Seminole—not an Indian chief!" she exclaimed, a sudden inspiration coming to her.

"You are right, Chaf-a-la-ya was born white, but then he died, and when he was born over again his skin was red; he is the great chief of the Seminole nation."

"And you—you are the man who wrested the papers from me in the vault below!"

Again the other laughed.

"And why should I have not done so?" he demanded. "The papers were mine. I took them from the person of the American while you were preparing the rope to lower him into the yard. In a garret next to the room where he was drugged I lived; through a sliding-panel I saw all that transpired. I recognized the American though years have passed since I saw his face. But you—you are a mystery. You are not Tampa Morel, for she is dead."

"But you, who are you that takes such a strange interest in this affair, and how comes it that all the secrets of this house are known to you?" a wild, visionary idea taking possession of her.

"I am Chaf-a-la-ya, the Seminole!"

It was plain to the girl's mind that the mind of this man was in a measure disordered.

"It was you, then, who carried the papers into the vault?"

"It was, and I tracked you down the river when you carried the American, senseless, in your boat. You plied me with brandy to make me do your will; I drank and pretended to become your slave, but it was that in time you should become mine! Chaf-a-la-ya is an old man, but he has many years of life in him yet. He wants a squaw, and you are the woman whom he has chosen! Consent and he will hold his tongue; refuse, and with a breath he will demolish your castle of lies!"

"Out of here, you beast, or with my own hands I will throw you from the door!" the girl cried, in fiery indignation, hurrying to the portal and unlocking the door.

The eyes of the chief had been fixed upon the glass of wine, sparkling upon the table, covetously, during all the interview, and as he now rose to his feet he seized upon the glass and at a single gulp swallowed it.

Turning the girl beheld him with the empty wine-glass in his hand, and in an instant she comprehended what had occurred; the man who had threatened to denounce her, with his own hand had taken the poisonous draught which she had prepared for herself!

"Do not drink—do not drink!" she cried, although, even at the very moment when she spoke, she knew that he had drank, and that so potent was the poison, and so well adjusted the dose, that not all the doctors in this world could have saved him from the fatal consequences of his rash act.

The Indian extended his hand, his lips moved as though he was trying to speak, but no sound came from them; his eyes became fixed, and then slowly he sunk down upon the floor, and almost instantly, without the least struggle, his life passed away.

The Seminole was dead! But, was he a Seminole? Was he a red-man at all?

This question puzzled the girl, and as soon as she recovered from the natural horror inspired by the sudden death, in such a strange manner, she knelt beside the body and proceeded to examine it.

First she ascertained, that life was really extinct; this she did by placing her hand upon the heart. Not the slightest pulsation was to be distinguished; death had ensued almost immediately. But, on opening the hunting-shirt that covered his breast she made an important find. It was a little buckskin bag containing a small package of old letters, tied up with a leather thong to which was attached a signet ring.

The girl knew enough of the history of the house of Morel to be aware, from the peculiar motto engraven upon the ring, that this was the signet of the Morel family, which had been handed down, with the utmost care, from father to son, and that John Morel had carried the ring away with him when he visited the New World.

The white breast of the man proved that he was no red-skin, although very deeply tanned by exposure to the elements.

The letters, too, were those that only John Morel would be apt to possess.

The secret, too, of his marvelous knowledge of the old hotel was explained. *The supposed Seminole was the French count!*

Then, to the memory of the girl came a story which she had heard in childhood, in Florida, which related how a white man captured by the red-men and rendered insane, but harmlessly so, by a blow on the head, had been adopted by the Indians under their superstitious notion that madmen are especially favored by the Great Spirit. The name of the man she had never heard, but now it was plain that it was the Count of Morel, who had so long been mourned for as dead. Not quite right in his ideas, yet with wit enough to understand what was going on, he had set out to baffle her schemes.

"He has been dead to the world—he shall continue so. The vaults below will serve for a burial-place," she muttered, moodily.

CHAPTER XLIV.

AND A STRANGER REVELATION.

THAT very night before she slept, this strangely-compounded girl came to a strange resolution, and in accordance with it early in the morning she sought General Calhoun.

"I have come to ask you to do me a favor," she said, abruptly.

The woman had made a deep impression upon the general's heart—more than he was willing to confess, even to herself, and therefore he hastened to say that he would only be too glad to oblige her in any way whatsoever.

"I want you to take me away from here; I wish to return to Florida, and as soon as possible. I do not wish to disturb the countess in her estate. Let all law proceedings be stopped at once and forever. I am weary of this land; I hate it—fear it, and I wish to fly far from it, never to return. But, do not let any one know of my intention. Frame some excuse—lead them to think the absence is of my own choice, and after a while will explain itself; but I must depart at once—this very day if it can be so arranged."

The American promised to do his best to comply with her wishes, and managed the matter so well that on the very next day they set sail from France, and as he confided to his companion when they were fairly at sea, he was in nowise sorry to leave a country wherein he had passed through such strange and disagreeable adventures.

Sad and melancholy—very much depressed was the girl all through the voyage, and until they landed in Florida.

It was their first night in the land of flowers and they had strolled forth from the hotel at which they had stopped, *en route* for Tampa Bay, and upon a mossy bank under a huge live-oak tree had paused to survey the beauty of the night which was rendered almost as light as day by a brilliant full moon rising slowly above the horizon, seemingly from a couch in the blue waters that belted in the coast.

"And here we part!" announced the girl, abruptly, as the general sat down by her side. She extended her hand to him. "Shake hands; say good-by; then go you to Punta Rosa, your home, and I, Heaven knows where—to lose myself if I can, in the land where I was born, but where no one knows aught of me."

Calhoun was amazed.

"Why, Miss Morel, what have I done to deserve such treatment as this?" he exclaimed. "Upon my life I have tried to serve you to the utmost of my power, although at times I confess I have a wild notion that you once played me an ugly trick. I know the idea seems ab-

surd, but I cannot help it, for there is something in your voice and manner which strongly reminds me of the veiled woman who captivated me at the Grand Opera ball."

"Your suspicion is right; I am that woman," she replied; "and though the confession gives me pain yet I should make it as a slight atonement for the trouble I have caused you."

"Oh, don't say a word; it isn't necessary. I am quite willing to forget and forgive as far as I am concerned, and though my experience in the lunatic asylum was not particularly pleasant yet I consider that I am more than repaid by the enjoyment which I have experienced in your society," he responded, gallantly.

"I must speak, for when you know all, perhaps you will not think so harshly of me as otherwise you may do," she said, evidently determined to persevere in the task which she had taken upon herself. "As you doubtless must suspect, I am *not* Tampa Morel—not the daughter of John Morel and your relative. On the contrary, my name is Camille Bienville, and I am the daughter of the French trader of Eau Gallie, Auguste Bienville. I am a year older than Tampa Morel, whom I well remember my father bringing as a child from the Indians. When I was about ten years old my father determined to return to France. Myself and Tampa, whom all supposed to be my sister, were sent in charge of a partner of my father to France—he following in the next ship. On the passage both the man who had charge of us and Tampa died, and their bodies were committed to the sea. Friendless and alone I landed. My adopted father never came, for he, too, perished on the voyage. I was reared by charity, and terrible was the life I led until I was about eighteen years old; then chance threw me in the way of a member of the secret police, and he needing a female spy employed me. From that moment I prospered, for the vocation suited me. La Marmoset, the Monkey, they termed me, from my craft and cunning, and as I began to make a name as a female spy I adopted some odd precautions. As a rule I never allowed any one to see me as I truly was—not even Monsieur Preval, the head of the force. In place of a young girl I appeared like a decrepit, sickly, middle-aged woman. As a police spy all the particulars of this Morel affair came to my knowledge. Then a bright idea, although a wicked one, flashed upon me. Tampa Morel was dead, but no one but myself knew of it. A fortune of fifty millions of francs seemed to be within my grasp, for I formed a plan to present myself as the heiress. La Marmoset must disappear, and in her place come the heiress of Morel. I decoyed you away because I fancied that on your person I should find papers which would be useful to me in carrying out the deception; it was all a part of my plan to place you in the private asylum, and then, when everything was ripe for the purpose, as Tampa Morel to rescue you from your imprisonment. The back windows of the wine-shop where you were drugged looked out upon the yard of the house where I had apartments, in another street. By means of a rope I conveyed you from the one house to the other, then kept you under the influence of a narcotic until I could convey you down the Seine to the Retreat, in the mean time fooling the minister of police as an Italian boy, and so throwing every one on a false scent."

"The scheme was a wonderful one, and wonderfully you executed it," the American observed, thoughtfully. "But tell me why, in the very moment of success, when the prize was your own—why did you throw up your hand and abandon the game?"

"Why?" and the woman laughed bitterly; "because at the last moment I discovered that the game was not worth the candle. I wanted the fifty millions of francs with which to purchase something, but when I went to buy I found that not ten times fifty millions would secure what I wanted; I had schemed and schemed for naught. Of what use was it, then, to lead a lying life longer? I grew sick of France and wished to bury myself here, in this new world, where in a new life I might forget the old one."

"And is that any reason why we should part company?" the general asked, earnestly. "Come! you own that you have wronged me; you owe me some recompense; make it, then, by allowing me to look after you in the future. I am all alone in the world—no near relatives; no one to care for me. If I was a younger man I should say, give me the privilege of trying to make you love me, but as it is, I am content to say—allow me the honor of being like a father or a brother to you."

"What! could you find it in your heart to marry such a woman as I am—little better than a scheming adventuress?"

"Give me the chance and see how quickly I will answer the question, by tendering you my hand!" the general replied, proudly.

She was touched by the nobleness of the reply, and for a few moments was silent, busy in thought.

"It shall be as you say," she replied at last; "we will not separate, if you wish it otherwise, and if in time I come to feel that I can accept

your offer in the same spirit in which you tender it, I will be your wife."

"The woman who hesitates is lost," saith the proverb, and the resolute girl who had played so desperate a game so boldly and skillfully was no exception to the rule.

Within six months she became the wife of General Calhoun.

With the beautiful Detective Queen—the famous La Marmoset, police spy, married and settled, our story virtually ends. As we may well believe, she proved to be a devoted wife, and was generally known as the Lovely Lady of Punta Rosa.

Dunbar received the hand of the fair countess in due time, and she never forgot that she owed her rescue from a most dreadful fate to the gallant young American.

The sudden and unaccountable disappearance of La Marmoset excited a great deal of wonder, in police circles, for quite a time, and the secret agents searched high and low for some clew which would lead to a revelation of the mystery, but at last Monsieur Preval, with that rare wisdom which so distinguished him—in his own opinion—hit upon an explanation:

The Detective Queen had been decoyed away by some scoundrel whom she had been instrumental in sending to Toulon and secretly murdered; and so the world believed, when this idea was made public, for what human sagacity could guess that the presumed heiress of Morel and La Marmoset were one and the same?

THE END.

Half-Dime Singer's Library

- 1 WHOA, EMMA! and 59 other Songs.
- 2 CAPTAIN CUFF and 57 other Songs.
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